

MATWATCH 1990 ANNUAL



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Wrestling

WHAT
WENT
WRONG?

MATWATCH 1990 ANNUAL:

What Went Wrong???

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MATWATCH 1990 ANNUAL:

**WHAT
WENT
WRONG???**

EDITOR/PUBLISHER

Steve Beverly

"THE LAST MATCH"

by

Dr. Gerald Morton

PHOTOGRAPHY

Steve Bryant

Ross Blair

Columbus Ledger-Enquirer

COMICS

Bill Kunkel

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**A
DEDICATION
TO
FRED WARD**

In our first two MATWATCH ANNUAL publications, we dedicated our efforts to people who had departed us during the years and left us with abundant memories: Bruiser Brody (1988) and Haystacks Calhoun (1989). I wish I could share a picture

with you of this year's honoree. He is one whom I consider my friend as well as a legendary name in wrestling. This is one year I wanted to honor someone still living and let an individual know what his life in wrestling has meant to me.

Fred Ward never wrestled for the NWA world heavyweight title but he had a distinguished career in the ring, nonetheless, as a junior heavyweight. Wrestling as "Pee Wee" Ward, he was a stand-out in Southern rings through the war years before he retired to promoting in the 1950s. And promote, he did.

Mr. Ward settled in Columbus, Georgia, and built a small frame building on Front Avenue in the Fountain City. Simply called The Sports Arena, it bordered the Chattahoochee River front near the old Columbus Iron Works and several of the city's textile mills, about a block from the main downtown business district of Broadway. It was in this modest building, which seated about 1,000 people, that Georgia wrestling legends of the 1950s were made.

In 1958, when I was a boy of four, living on 35th Street in Columbus, the city built what at the time was considered a showplace arena, more palatial and expansive than Atlanta's aging City Auditorium or facilities in Macon or Savannah. The Columbus Municipal Auditorium seated 5,300 and was the pride of a sleeper community poised for explosive growth in the next two decades.

Fred Ward promoted the first event ever in the Municipal Auditorium. No, it wasn't wrestling. It was the "A" show of the traveling troupe of "Holiday on Ice." The four nights of shows sold out the building and laid a foundation for a future. Mr. Ward went on to bring Lawrence Welk, Pat Boone, Kate Smith, the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus and a host of other topline acts of the day to the auditorium. His daughter, Rose

Ward Ogle has often told me her father took great pride in bringing mainline entertainment events to Columbus.

But Mr. Ward's legend was made with a Wednesday night tradition: NWA wrestling. Lou Thesz appeared on the first show in the auditorium. Through the years, the great and near-great appeared for him. Rogers, O'Connor, Kiniski, Funk, Brisco, Race, Flair and Georgia stars Galento, Tillet, Woods, Steinborn, Bockwinkel, Colt, DeMarco, Anderson, Armstrong raised the volume level of the little building for nearly 30 years under Mr. Ward's stewardship.

He continued to use the Sports Arena as the showcase for his Saturday afternoon live television shows which alternated for years between WTVM and WRBL-TV. A real estate entrepreneur as well, Mr. Ward had sold the land to Fuqua Communications in 1966 to build a new plant for the ABC affiliate.

COLUMBUS CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING was the last local program to convert to color telecasting. It didn't happen until 1972, which made the Saturday hour an anachronism through the late sixties against the glorious hues of network and local news programs. But Mr. Ward believed in the immediacy a live broadcast created. Until the early 1970s when Atlanta NWA shows shifted to WTCG and morning tapings, scheduling Georgia wrestlers between Atlanta and Columbus on Saturdays created a monster headache (and for years, Mr. Ward taped a separate show for his Macon viewers). I recall once in 1974 when Mr. Wrestling II and Buddy Colt headed a crew which had done two hours of TV in Atlanta at 10 a.m., driven to Columbus for the 4:00 live show for WRBL, then flew in private planes to make an 8:00 card in my little hometown of Waycross.

Mr. Ward believed in wrestling, as violent as it often was, being family entertainment. He and his wife Frances would greet regular ticketbuyers as they arrived as if they were family. But they also prowled the aisles and if you uttered a profanity, you went out---no questions asked. They didn't want you spoiling things for others.

When I returned to Columbus as a young reporter/anchor in 1976, Mr. Ward immediately befriended me. Shortly after arriving, my boss discovered I knew a little something about wrestling. So, we experiment with me on the 11:00 news on

Wednesday nights calling the play-by-play of about a minute and 15 seconds of clips from the evening's matches during sports. If the arena show ran long, we sweated staying until the last possible minute, then rushing back the film (we didn't yet have the immediacy of videotape) for processing and fast editing onto the master show reel.

It was amazing. I called it straight, same as I'd watched Gordon Solie and Ed Capral do for years. I introduced the terms "thumb-to-the-throat" and "face-is-a-crimson-mask" to the local news audience. Mr. Ward loved it. The wrestling fans thought I was giving them an honest recap of the show and the non-fans felt I was strictly lampooning.

Every time I appeared on Saturdays at the arena, Mr. Ward would introduce me before the show as if I was a celebrity. I would spend many weekend afternoons enjoying the thrills of my youth. I rarely saw Mr. Ward without a smile. Except twice. Once, when Thunderbolt Patterson began spewing profanities live on the air. T'bolt was suspended from the next week's show. When he did it again, Patterson was fired. I asked Mr. Ward about it. He told me, "Steve, when things are unpleasant, sometimes, you'd rather not talk about them. This is one of them."

On one other occasion, Mr. Ward had set up a battle royal with a "\$3,000" jackpot for the winner. The usual cosmetic check was presented to the survivor, Austin Idol. Only Idol went to the bank and cashed the dummy check. Idol, to my knowledge, never worked for Fred Ward again.

The 1980s were somewhat wistful for Mr. Ward. He acknowledged the money and momentum being built by Vince McMahon. He had been close friends with McMahon Sr. During the years when Mr. Ward was second vice president of the National Wrestling Alliance, he and the elder McMahon had shared time together at the Las Vegas conventions. But Mr. Ward didn't like what was happening to the industry. In 1984, when McMahon pulled a power play and gained controlling interest in Georgia Championship Wrestling, Inc., and its weekly three hours on Ted Turner's WTBS, Mr. Ward and his son-in-law Ralph Freed helped Ole Anderson bankroll a morning hour, CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING FROM GEORGIA, on the SuperStation. But the money was drying up to continue to pay rising stars such

major stars such as Jake Roberts, Ted DiBiase and the Road Warriors. Those who didn't vault straight to Titan Sports went to work for Bill Watts or Verne Gagne.

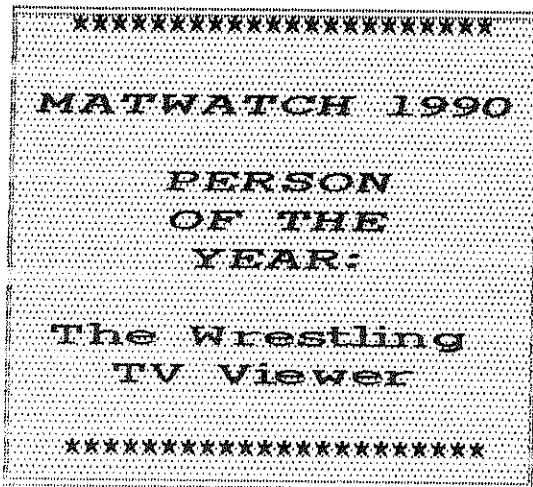
When Jim Crockett finally gained control of the WTBS time from McMahon in 1985, the old Saturday shows at the Sports Arena in Columbus ended and with it an era of wrestling folklore. Mr. Ward continued to be the name promoter for Columbus, Macon and Albany under the Crockett banner until early 1989. But he could no longer structure the shows and orient them toward the local fans. The locals were primed by the same generic shows the rest of the country was seeing and the old feeling of having "our wrestlers" coming to town week after week was lost.

Publicly, I never heard Fred Ward express one word of bitterness. About six months after I began doing MATWATCH, I showed up at the Columbus auditorium after almost a decade away and Mr. Ward, now as white of hair as Bob Barker, sought me out and hugged my neck. He told me he'd missed me and was truly glad to see me. I felt as if I was at a family reunion.

Later that night, Mr. Ward told me, "Steve, it's just not like it used to be. I can make recommendations but they don't usually listen to me much. It's never going to be the same. There's too much money in it and too much TV. I've had a good run and I'll be okay. But I can't help but worry if they're not going to kill it. That almost happened in the fifties when so much was on TV but TV wasn't in every home like it is now."

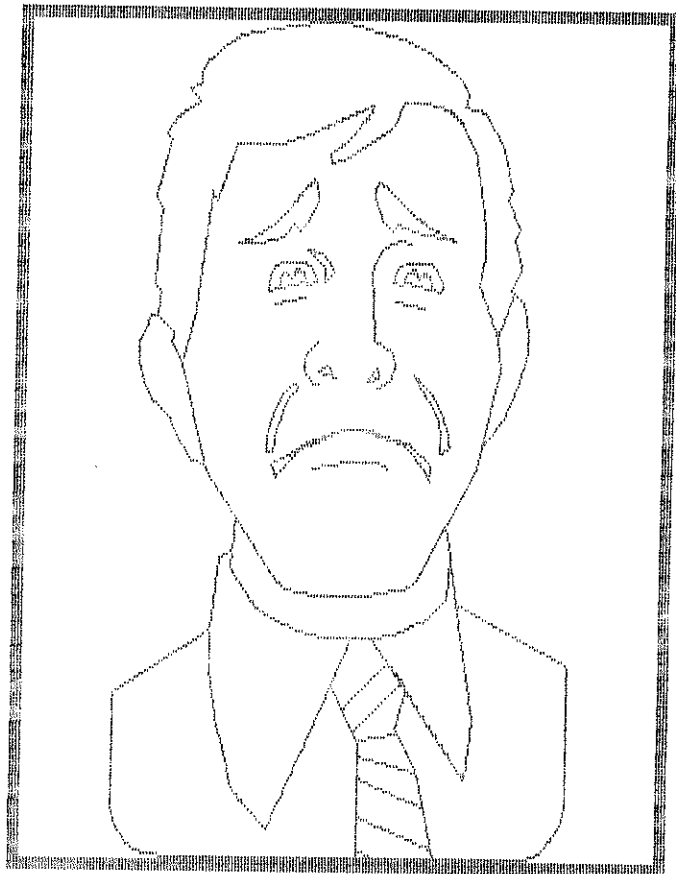
A few weeks later, one of my best friends, Columbus newspaper columnist Richard Hyatt, told me of a similar conversation with Mr. Ward. "He just called me out of nowhere one day," Richard said. "He asked me to have lunch with him and he said he just wanted to tell me he'd always liked me and wanted me to know it."

The new generation will never know how what Fred Ward did for wrestling over four decades paved the way for what the McMahons, the Turners, the Jarretts and possibly the Pedicinos of the world are able to do today. Mr. Ward is enjoying retirement near Green Island Country Club in Columbus. I wish more of you could know him. You would like him. It is in that spirit we dedicate the MATWATCH 1990 ANNUAL to Fred C. Ward with a thank-you note for being the wrestling legend he is.



What's that you say? No celebrity winning the coveted MATWATCH MAN, or redubbed PERSON OF THE YEAR award? No long biography on the spotlighted personality's achievements during the twelve months past? Has the editor lost his clothesline-worn mind?

Shall we begin by reviewing a list of considerations for the year 1990?:



***THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR: The man who benefited from the most massive buildup for a major title change in wrestling history and had been for more than a year groomed to become Hulk Hogan's heir apparent. But through circumstances not totally within his own control, he is yet to live up to the WWF expectations.

***STING: Again, a can't miss successor to Ric Flair's throne who shot a blank, again through no total fault of his own.

***HULK HOGAN: We gave serious consideration to this one, even though he lost the belt. Why? He was deified even more than ever in dropping the title to the Warrior and the last half of 1990 proved how difficult it is for the WWF to draw without Hogan. But we ruled this one out because of Hogan's limited schedule.

***OLE ANDERSON: No, I didn't have too much egg nog for Christmas. It's just that as in years when TIME magazine has selected a news figure one might consider a villain, simply because of his or her influence on the news, Anderson came close to getting the nod because his seven-month WCW booking tenure epitomized the theme of this annual, WHAT WENT WRONG???

***JERRY LAWLER: This man had to display his underrated versatility more than in any of his past years in the business. He began 1990 as a heavy, insulting heel, displaying some of the most talented commentary in television. He then turned in late spring, culminating a series in which he dropped the USWA belt to Memphis black favorite Snowman. Plus, his involvement in the most celebrated angle of the year is detailed at length in the annual. But none of these efforts resulted in dramatic gate turnarounds in Memphis and Lawler shows increasing signs of succumbing to the Dusty Rhodes syndrome of not being able to let go of the central spotlight.

***DENNIS CORALUZZO AND JOEL GOODHART: For promoting a card with heart, the benefit for ailing performer Tom Robinson, which brought together some of this country's greatest independent stars. But MATWATCH is a TV-oriented publication and this was not affiliated with television.

But our decision is to present the MATWATCH PERSON OF THE YEAR AWARD to a collective entity, the television wrestling viewer: which includes you. We do so because the television viewer has grown more expectant and been more disappointed in 1990 than in any recent year. He has been treated to more nationally-distributed television wrestling shows than in any given year and with the exception of a few hot-shot specials, is watching them with less frequency. Pardon me ladies if I refer to the generic "he" but the "she" of the wrestling TV viewer has had to endure equally as much.

The year 1990 saw a Thanksgiving week of prime time wrestling (see MATWATCH TOP 15 NEWS STORIES OF THE YEAR) on three different broadcast and cable entities which saw ratings decline over year-ago levels on virtually every special.

The fan was subjected during 1990 to blatant and ugly racism (the TBS Ole Anderson-Ric Flair-Rocky King-Junkyard Dog angle), ill-timed tastelessness in an American soldier-turned-traitor angle (Sgt. Slaughter as Saddam Hussein follower), an attempted live murder (the Eddie Gilbert-Jerry Lawler car rundown angle), weekly sexist catfights with raised skirts and torn blouses (the Tessa-Dirty White Girl battles in Memphis) and a double gang war (The Four Horsemen vs. The Dudes with Attitudes). All of this came from television screens and yet, arena attendance continued to decline and television ratings stayed either flat or fell after the first quarter.

The viewer was given two new national standardbearers (The Warrior and Sting) which market research had indicated would ring the bell with younger people and sell a lot of products. The public bought neither, though the fault has to be placed at the foot of critical post-title marketing mistakes by both the WWF and WCW. An attempt at a black champion (Snowman in USWA) failed because he was never marketed at more than the Memphis audience and, then, not at a crossover demographic following.

The viewer was asked to buy into a mystery which went on about three months too long (The Black Scorpion) and was rejected when the wrestler turned into a magician. The pay-per-view watcher was asked to accept a movie character as a title star of a show in the nation's capitol and then, the star (Robocop) appeared

only for a fleeting moment. He was asked to get excited about a cage match (Flair-Luger) which would ultimately decide the fate of a belt but the champion's manager (Woman) was allowed inside the cage during the match.

The viewer saw Turner Broadcasting produce a unilaterally bad CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS (Thanksgiving Thunder) and was asked to believe Curtis Hughes, The Nightstalker and the Motor City Madman were ready for big-time main event competition. Vince McMahon kept trying to make fans believe Dino Bravo is a great star.

Wrestling TV viewers were asked to get excited one more time about a fat man in polkadots (Dusty Rhodes) being deserted by supposed friends. They didn't and cheered when he lost. The viewer was asked to regenerate interest in a giant (El Gigante) but was smart enough to see this former basketball player was not ready for competition.

The viewer was subjected to continued shuffling of announcers on programs, with the exception of Jim Ross, Lance Russell and Vince McMahon and found it hard to focus on who was on what show. The TV MATWATCHer, at least the young one, began to embrace a fuzzy character named Norman and just as he began to click, a new booker decided he didn't fit the puzzle.

The 1990 TV viewer was told the Road Warriors couldn't be the Road Warriors any more, was denied a second year of the innovative humor of Terry Funk, lost a national treasure in Jesse Ventura, had to search like authorities for a kidnap victim to find Jim Cornette and watched a coming star (Cactus Jack Manson) be told on-air by his booker to "take a powder, get out of my face, just go." And the booker wasn't just playing an angle.

The viewer had his/her moments. Paul E. Dangerously returned to a national slot, Hulk Hogan was immortalized in a brilliant video, Curt Hennig was perhaps the best ring performer on American television until he had to face Kerry Von Erich, Ventura was never better than on the Hogan-Warrior title change, Ross had one of his finest performances on the Sting-Flair title switch and Lance Russell aged like the best of Ernest and Julio Gallo.

But he/she also had to endure Monday nights with Herb Abrams (though one wonders if more than absolute hardcores did), the Junkyard Dog vs. Moondog Rex on pay-per-view, several Bravo, War-

lord and Bad News Brown matches for which one was asked to pay to watch in one's own home and should have demanded a rebate, a cigar-smoking woman (Vicious Vicki in Memphis), Norman as a truck driver, Leon Spinks as a referee, Brad Armstrong as a Candyman and McMahon cheapening a life-threatening injury to Brutus Beefcake as merely another element of a wrestling storyline.

This was the year when the viewer finally told promotions it was wise to the fact that major titles don't change hands unless cameras are rolling (though WCW attempted to do so with no lenses at its fall Meadowlands show and the WWF changed a title for an NBC show, then didn't air it and decided the match was never held) and stayed home more. The year 1990 saw the television excesses, in both saturation and storylines, of the explosion which began in 1984 catch up with themselves and planted the seed for viewers to turn sets off in greater numbers in 1991.

Perhaps my influence in making a choice for this award came from a column I wrote in MATWATCH in June 1990, one which stirred controversy in some wrestling circles, entitled "I Think I've Seen It All Before." So many of the television angles finally appeared to be little more than recyclings of episodes I've seen time and again in the past 25 years, only a cast member here or there was different. If the viewer is like me, he has a high level of expectation and saw very little originality during 1990. And he/she was left wondering if things would get any better in the year to come or would more people do as former MATWATCHer Bob Luedhe, who wrote to say, "Cancel my subscription. I am no longer a wrestling fan."

The wrestling television viewer was asked to endure a lot which did not satisfy him/her in 1990 and deserves a special recognition, if for no other reason than hanging in there through it all. The 1990 MATWATCH PERSON OF THE YEAR is The Television Wrestling Viewer with a wistful hope that at least one someone in the industry can grab 1991 by the throat and make it his or her own and place the award back where it belongs---to people like Eddie Gilbert and Terry Funk, who made each of the two previous years special.

MATWATCHER OF THE YEAR:

Ed Capral



ED CAPRAL

Matwatcher of the Year (Right)

With Former Boxing Champ Jersey Joe Walcott

He was a born and bred Georgia Bulldog. But he had a chance to play with a little passing fad called television. And he was good at it.

He worked at the same television station as a young personality who for 17 years emceed a local amateur hour called STARS OF TOMORROW. In the early days of pro wrestling on TV, he did the commercials on a weekly hour called LIVE ATLANTA WRESTLING.

He understudied a top-flight announcer named Ray McKay, doing commercials for LIVE ATLANTA and occasionally, sitting in as a guest color commentator before the audience knew what color meant.

One week, McKay told him of vacation plans. "Ed," said McKay, "I want you to do the show next week---by yourself." The young announcer gulped and volunteered that he would try, though he couldn't figure out why McKay would want him---he was a good ad pitchman and booth announcer but he'd never called play-by-play.

He became caught up in the enthusiasm of the live hour and the audience seemed to respond to his work. During the week, he learned McKay would again be gone the next Saturday. In fact, McKay never came back. With few exceptions for vacations over the next 20 years, Ed Capral never left.

Within a couple of years, he was known as The Voice of Wrestling and as Atlanta grew in stature as a city, so did Ed Capral's reputation. Many wrestling announcers become associated with specific grapplers through the years. With Gordon Solie, it was Eddie Graham---then a succession of younger performers, including Jack Brisco, Tim Woods, Dusty Rhodes and Roddy Piper. With Capral, it was Freddie Blassie, a man Ed has called "the greatest personality I ever worked with." Blassie made his excursions to Madison Square Garden and to Los Angeles but never strayed far from his Georgia roots.

Blassie became Capral's perpetual antagonist. Legend has it Capral was the first announcer to whom Blassie ever used the term "pencil-necked geek." The tete-a-tete continued until the late fifties when Blassie had "irritated" Capral so much the red-headed king of mike men agreed to team with Georgia star Don McIntyre in a match against Blassie at the Atlanta City Auditorium. Once asked on the air if he'd ever had a wrestling career, Capral said, "Yes, sir. I had some matches. I had eight and lost eight."

As the sixties blossomed, Blassie developed kidney problems and heels such as Dr. Jerry Graham and Mario Galento took over the Georgia scene. In 1961, Capral's commercial announcer was a young man who would eventually go on to stardom of his own---Tom Snyder. Occasionally, on his old NBC TOMORROW show and on his ABC Radio talkfest, Snyder has recalled his days with his "good friend" Capral. One recollection: "I remember the night Ed was intensely calling this match with Dr. Jerry Graham and an absolutely hopeless opponent. The good doctor was beating the poor fellow to a pulp when he started bleeding. And Dr. Graham moved in and with his teeth, began to gnaw on the poor guy. There was Ed getting more and more into this and so was the crowd. There they were: adult people screaming over a grown man....biting a scab."

Between 1954 and 1974, Ed Capral called matches of nearly every great competitor in wrestling, including some of the most spectacular upsets. He was there when Enrique and Alberto (later Ramon) Torres became the NWA world tag team champions and began a three-year reign as the most dominant team in wrestling. He once irritated referee/color announcer Leo Garibaldi (much to the delight of fans who quickly wearied of Garibaldi) on air to the point Leo left the table. He presided over the reformed Galento bringing out a double-barrel shotgun to chase away the evil Medics. He catapulted El Mongol to stardom, as the purported first man to defeat Mr. Wrestling (Woods). He called the first Georgia match in which Lars Anderson (Larry Heinimini) was defeated (by Woods).

Ed's secret to his longevity and success was in never intruding on the action. He doesn't talk much about his wrestling days, preferring to enjoy retirement in Panama City FL. But in my graduate research at Auburn University, Ed told me his formula: "The older guys in the business: myself, Gordon Solie and Bob Caudle treated wrestling just like an NFL game on Sunday. We'd set up the matchups with strengths and weaknesses and we tried to do a legitimate sports-oriented commentary. In those days, that's what people wanted." He did it well enough that his voice was in demand as a substitute announcer all over the country. He was a frequent fill-in for Solie in Florida and presided (with Jim Crockett Sr.) over the day Dick Murdoch and Rene Goulet walked out on The Great Malenko on CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING FROM FLORIDA, turning Malenko babyface. He called a San Francisco TV match between Red Bastien and Johnny Valentine, in which Bastien won but Valentine destroyed Red in the post-match.

If Gordon Solie was the Walter Cronkite of wrestling, Capral was the Chet Huntley, always careful to maintain enough neutrality to wear well, though you knew Ed didn't really like the heels. Until one day. Butcher Vachon, who had lost a loser-leave-Georgia match two months earlier, was shown in a still shot on a boat "in his native Canada" at the beginning of the BIG TIME WRESTLING broadcast in October 1967. For those two months, a masked Oriental character with the label of Oki Yama had terrorized Georgia, with a style as well-disguised as Ric Flair did as The Black Scorpion. Enrique Torres and the second-year veteran Bob Armstrong took on Yama and El Mongol in what turned out to be one of the top tag matches of the year. Torres was on the verge of applying his patented airplane spin finish when Yama reversed the maneuver into a swinging "hangman's hold," a trademark of Vachon. Capral suddenly went berserk, or at least as out-of-character wild as Ed could get. "Look, Leo.

That's the Butcher's favorite hold. Oki Yama is using the swinging hangman. That's Butcher Vachon's...."

"Ah, Ed...you don't think?"

"I certainly do and I'm going to get to the bottom of this when we come back from this commercial."

Only Ed didn't get to the bottom of it. He jumped in the garbage can and stomped on it. Without a blink after the break, Ed turned to manager Dandy Jack Crawford and proclaimed: "I want the fans in the studio to hear it. I want you to hear this. I want the fans at home to hear it. This man---Okie Yama---is THE BUTCHER VACHON!!!" The 80 or so regulars in the WAIH-TV audience went nuts. It was literally the only time I ever saw Ed Capral jump across the line into advocacy and it popped the crowd and the home audience because it was so out-of-character. Yes, it sold tickets for the next two months.

In 1972, Ed saw wrestling begin an era which would eventually change its face on a national basis. After 18 years on the ABC affiliate, the NWA show, now called GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING moved to Ted Turner's WTCG, a small independent struggling for identity. "I'd known Ted for a number of years and he'd ask me every time he'd see me, 'Why don't you bring the wrestling over to my station?' We didn't seriously consider it because we were doing well on Channel 11," Ed told me about two years ago. "But then WQXI got a new general manager who decided to change things around. He moved us out of our traditional 6:30 time slot and put us on at 11. That was the first mistake. Then, he got the idea of putting us on after Monday Night Football, so we were trying to sell the Friday night shows in Atlanta with a show that aired after midnight on Monday nights. That didn't work. So, we made the move to Ted."

Turner promised promoter Paul Jones and promotion owners Tom Renesto and Ray Gunkel a permanent move back to 6:00 (opposite the local newscasts in Atlanta) Saturdays and a repeat showing every Wednesday night at 10. GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, within three months, became the breakthrough show Turner was seeking to get advertisers to seek out his channel. "We became the first show ever to deliver more than 100,000 homes on Channel 17 and quickly became the number one show on the station. We'd cream the news on the other stations."

But July 1972 would be fateful for Capral's career and the long-term direction of Georgia wrestling. Ray Gunkel died in a dressing room of a heart attack at 48 after a match in Savannah with Ox Baker. Two weeks later, his wife, the late Ann Gunkel, appeared at the wrestling office ready to go to

work. This set off a chain reaction power struggle between Ms. Gunkel and promoter Jones, who assumed he was in control. By the first week in December, Ann walked out of the office and took 25 of the 27 NWA wrestlers with her. Only Bob Armstrong and Roberto Soto remained with Jones. Ed Capral, likewise, faced a critical decision.

"I was very close to Ray and Ann personally," Capral said, "and I was extremely close to Paul Jones. But I made the decision to go with Ann." A compromise was reached with WTCG and for the next two years, GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, which temporarily had to be infused with commuting talent from Florida and veterans such as Eddie Graham, Don Curtis and Hiro Matsuda coming out of retirement, aired at 6 p.m., followed by ALL-SOUTH CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING at 7.

ALL-SOUTH, with Ed Capral as host, became the first Southeastern wrestling show to be taped in actual arenas. That continued for a year until the remote facilities became too expensive and the show returned to the WTCG studio. For two years, the NWA-affiliated GCW group duked it out with ALL-SOUTH. GCW was the first to use The Omni for wrestling and began running unprecedented twice-weekly house shows (Tuesdays and Fridays) to counteract the Tuesday night shows of ALL-SOUTH. But in the second year, ALL-SOUTH began to wear down against the enormous popularity of GCW's Mr. Wrestling II and the bankrolling of major national talent to appear in the Omni. A last-ditch effort of Joe Hamilton unmasking as Assassin II did not light a fire. Failure to produce announced stars such as Dick the Bruiser and Bruno Sammartino left fans with a disappointed taste. Finally, two weeks before Thanksgiving in 1974, Ed Capral called his last Georgia TV match, slightly more than 20 years after his debut on the old Channel 8 in Atlanta. Ann Gunkel sold out to Paul Jones.

Ed went on to host Jim Crockett's WIDE WORLD WRESTLING from 1974 to 1977, where he became associated with the young Ric Flair. "Flair, even at that age, was the greatest showman I ever saw in wrestling," said Capral. "I knew he was headed for a big career."

Were it not for his fateful 1972 decision, Ed Capral would have gone on to become the major star on the SuperStation, instead of Gordon Solie, who replaced him on WTCG (later WTBS). It could have been Capral Roddy Piper saved from an attack by Don Muraco. It would have been Capral who introduced the Freebirds to a national cable satellite audience. Capral would have been around when Ole Anderson finally gave up the ghost in 1984 and sold out to Vince McMahon Jr. He may even today be the host of the WRESTLING NEWS NETWORK on the WCW POWER HOUR. Or would he?

Capral, who doesn't talk much now about his wrestling days and refuses to knock the changes in the sport (though some acquaintances say he isn't fond of them at all) but remembers his years fondly as having "made me a good living," probably would have retired before the massive explosion of the eighties. "I woke up one morning and realized I was 50 years old and it was time to move on," Capral told me. "This is a young man's business. I was young when I started and I had a good run but it was time to move on to other things."

Those other things have included a comfortable semi-retirement on the Gulf Coast of Florida, an advertising agency which still handles accounts in Northwest Florida and Alabama, and a happy life with his wife. I remember my first conversation with Ed and it was like a stupid kid meeting one of his heroes: "I'm one of those many people who has met you through the years but whom you don't remember. I met you in Atlanta when I came to BIG TIME WRESTLING a couple of times in the sixties but growing up, you were one of my idols and I want to tell you how much enjoyment you brought me through the years. In a sense, you're one of the people who influenced me to get into this crazy business of broadcasting."

Ed thanked me, a bit embarrassed, but said it's not unlike how he and his wife feel about another performer. "We've always said if we ever crossed paths with Andy Griffith, we'd probably act like tourists just telling him how much we've enjoyed his shows through the years and still do."

Capral came out of retirement one time: in 1985 for Joe Pedicino's two-hour documentary, "The History of Professional Wrestling in Atlanta." He did so because it was dedicated to Paul Jones. Ironically, Ann Gunkel also appeared on the show. Ed brought some of his old newspaper clippings and an old tape of an ALL-SOUTH match was presented.

Since 1989, Ed Capral has been a MATWATCHer....and a frequent pen pal. That same year, we named our MATWATCH All-Star team of the ten top play-by-play announcers ever and Ed was number one. And likely, he always will be. He was, first and foremost, a broadcaster and a great one. And I've often said the top three promotions in America would do well to bring in Ed as a consultant to coach young announcing talent. In my book, he wrote the book.

With sincere pleasure, we name ED CAPRAL our third MATWATCHER OF THE YEAR with a fond hope that one day, he'll find it in himself to come out of retirement just one time and let us hear that dynamic voice. Ed, thanks for the memories.



WHAT WENT WRONG???

Hardcore fans would argue through eternity whether the use or misuse of Mike Shaw as Norman is a major part of what went wrong in 1990. But the reality is Norman was a solid breakthrough

character for World Championship Wrestling with children and not capitalized on for his marketing possibilities.

Over the next pages, the MATWATCH 1990 ANNUAL examines literally WHAT WENT WRONG during the past year, one of wrestling's most indifferent and decadent in more than ten years. Its personalities, its promotional foulups, its arguably questionable booking decisions, its television weaknesses may have made the beginning of the 1990s a pivotal period for the ring's future.



WHAT WENT WRONG: AN ANALYSIS OF WRESTLING 1990

To call the wrestling year 1990 lackluster is like saying a fly will go after an open sandwich at a summer picnic. Wrestling, like any other forms of popular entertainment goes through down cycles. One recalls in 1984, when not one situation comedy finished in the Nielsen top ten for the first time in history and some critics declared sitcoms a dying art form. That fall, a small phenomenon called THE COSBY SHOW emerged as one of TV's quickest resurrections.

Wrestling is not dead but it has some serious ailments which need surgery. How did it get that way? It didn't start in 1990 but several compound fractures brought on the current rupture. The MATWATCH 1990 ANNUAL analysis examines several reasons as to WHAT WENT WRONG:

THE HOGAN PHENOMENON

In the marvelous book THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW, Andy tells how the first 13 weeks after Don Knotts left the show were among the worst days of his career. The producers made the cardinal error of trying to replace the institution of Barney Fife. Young standup comedian Jack Burns was brought on as Warren Ferguson, the obnoxious "huh?-yeah-huh?-yeah-huh?" wisecracker as Andy's new deputy. "I got all strung out," Andy says in the book. "We were giving him Don Knotts material and it wasn't working at all." In fact, if one studies the series closely in reruns, one senses the discomfort Andy Taylor, hence Andy Griffith, felt with the chemistry. Some of the episodes are grating to watch of perhaps television's most enduring series.

Taking this analogy, one can relate the difficulties Titan Sports has had in passing its torch from the biggest mainline celebrity in wrestling history. In one instance, Titan made a prudent move in pulling Ultimate Warrior from television for the first four weeks after his victory over Hulk Hogan at WRESTLEMANIA VI, except for interviews and one victory run across the ring area. But Titan had taken the Warrior and given him Hulk Hogan material but didn't let Hogan fade into a supporting role.

However, the immediate focus shifted to Jesse Ventura's tag line from the end of WRESTLEMANIA, "Hulkamania just may live forever." For nearly two months, Hogan was, for all intents and purposes, still champion, reminiscent of the aftermath of Muhammad Ali's loss to Joe Frazier in 1971 for the world heavyweight boxing title. Frazier was beaten to a pulp in victory, wound up in the hospital for a week and Ali went around telling the media he was rooked out of the title and was still the "people's champion." Frazier never gained the respect he deserved for his 13th round knockdown of Ali and always lived in the shadow of the Louisville Lip.

In addition, the Warrior character was shifted to a "dark side" focus, which was a second cousin to Kevin Sullivan's old "lady of the lake" storylines, in becoming a counterpoint to Hogan for the title. McMahon was somewhat cornered himself, in that no heel in the group was convincing enough to score an upset on Hogan for a short-term villain title reign (a la Ivan Koloff and Stan Stasiak in the 1970s and the Iron Sheik in 1983) and Warrior had to evolve into an "almost-but-not-quite" heel state to provide suitable contrast for the showdown.

Third, the factor remains that Warrior beat the most popular character in wrestling history. One analogy I have often drawn is the difficulty Jack Nicklaus had in achieving mass popularity with golf fans until Arnold Palmer was well past his prime in the mid-1970s. Why? Because from the 1963 U.S. Open, Nicklaus habitually beat Palmer and that was mortal sin to do The King. The extraordinary cheers Nicklaus heard when he won his sixth Masters at the age of 46 in 1986 was dramatic contrast to the 1967 event at Augusta when a fan yelled, "Top that, Fat Jack," from the 13th fairway. Jim Hellwig's character had developed a charisma with a

younger generation of fans but the win over Hogan was a line the Warrior could not cross without violating sanctity.

As late as SUMMER SLAM, Warrior was still decidedly in Hogan's shadow. The Ultimate Warrior-Rick Rude confrontations were a natural followup to Rude's win over the Warrior at WRESTLEMANIA V. But so much emphasis was placed on the Hogan revenge match against Earthquake, preceded by the enormous sympathy card campaign, that the Warrior-Rude cage match in Philadelphia had no chance to serve as anything but an anticlimax.

Is the answer to do to Warrior as Democrats did to Jimmy Carter in 1980? Hardly. The character needs two solid years on top to build and prove whether The Ultimate Warrior can develop into the promotion standard-bearer, reasonably out of Hogan's shroud. In a sense, it's like Tim Conway's many television efforts to be a headliner. Conway has been one of the medium's most beloved supporting sketch comedians but has never experienced blowout success as a lead performer. The same has been true with Don Knotts, post-ANDY GRIFFITH. But the "dump Warrior" skeptics are reacting much too radically for the time elapsed.

FLAIR'S BABYFACE FAILURE

This time last year, many of us were confounded as to why the long-awaited babyface turn of Ric Flair had failed to send crowds soaring. Certainly, his dramatic return after an 11-week layoff at the 1989 Baltimore GREAT AMERICAN BASH signaled an extraordinary response. The Terry Funk series had the promise of rekindling the fire in those who felt the Ricky Steamboat-family unit contrast to Flair was weak, despite their dramatic battles. Funk was a character and a heel which transcended the old school of high workrate with 1980s sizzle. If nothing else, Flair had the ultimate charisma people wanted to see in a popular heavyweight champion during the five long years of the Dusty Rhodes regime.

I have theorized on why Flair-as-babyface failed in 1989-90 when it was an enormous success in the early 1980s for an extended period. Ultimately, the reason is simple: this time, Flair didn't turn---his opponents merely changed. And in today's TV

era, Flair could have set a different standard as to a macho image for a wrestler which could have lasted well into the 1990s and prolonged his championship reign. Probably the fact that he assumed his own booking chores at the time and conflicts with the WCW front office enveloped the problem.

My close confidante Dick Bourne, one of the great Flair followers of the era, particularly in his years of dominance in the Carolinas, points out a key to the entire issue---and it involves the use of television, of which Flair has been a master. "When Ric became a babyface in the early '80s, he would look right into the camera and instead of the yelling and screaming Ric Flair, he would deliver the most sincere, calm, deliberate but believable interview, which had you convinced he was concerned about the heel challenger but you knew he'd come through it," says Bourne. That's the Flair I feel many of us needed to see for there to be a true transformation. He came close to it during the interview Jim Ross did in June 1989 in the GUTS AND GLORY special while still in the neck brace. But we never saw any of that Flair after that. He was still predominantly the same high-stylin', profilin' Flair, still the Nature Boy and it was not enough of a change to effect a true turn. TBS also has to be a co-indicted conspirator here. The marketing of Flair-as-babyface was as weak, if not weaker than the WWF efforts with Ultimate Warrior. The very week Flair returned to action, Turner Home Entertainment should have had ready a "Best of Ric Flair" home video, which I was told as early as 1988 was in development. The living keepsake of a Flair career video would have been a hot seller and enhanced his new image. Flair, himself, could have introduced it with a personal message to fans. In addition, an announced Ric Flair book never materialized and such a volume as a TV companion could have further elevated the Flair image. No less an expert than Funk told me the night before last year's WRESTLE WAR that the image of Flair needed to be shifted from the "nature boy" to the true "living legend" that he should be and the marketing was simply incorrect.

I have dipped back into 1989 for support in my view that the February 1990 retransformation to a heel was much too quick for

Flair and not, in my view, necessary for Sting to have had an effective launch as champion. In fact, a Sting upset over a babyface Flair with Ric raising Sting's hand at the end may have done more to launch Sting into an effective run as champion than the abortion of 1990. Flair would have had more options as a "living legend" who had passed the torch, yet still had enough in him to make another run at the top. Flair-Stan Hansen or Flair-Sid Vicious could have been an fresh programs for Ric and he could have escaped the still-lingering dilution of the Four Horsemen gang which weakened his latter years as champion.

RETURN OF THE GANGS

Professional wrestling suffers from some of the same faults of network television and one should not be surprised, considering how each feeds off each other. One key shortcoming is in not knowing when to let long-in-the-tooth characters, feuds or images die. Can one honestly argue that DALLAS is a series, now in its 14th season, which should still be on the air? Now that most of the COSBY kids are grown, can that beloved series ever recapture its original magic? Only a unique show such as CHEERS can survive subtle changes and be a number one hit after nine seasons.

The revival of the NWA's gangs is another arguable reason as to what went wrong in 1990 and a key factor in why Sting's start as NWA world champion was a weak one. The popularity of the Four Horsemen, along with Randy Savage's emergence in 1985 as a WWF heel, was the keynote of the antihero image which has characterized pro wrestling in its last half-decade. The original Flair-Andersons-Blanchard combination engineered a tremendous surge of unintended babyface reactions, even if it did dilute Flair's ability to be a dominant champion. The shift of Lex Luger into the foursome, particularly when Ole was fighting against them, continued to be effective. But once Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson left for the WWF, the Horsemen were dead and it was time to declare a funeral. Membership in the Horsemen was shifting almost as much as the direction of a beach seabreeze.

To revive the heel Horsemen in 1990 with their confusing membership roll was like trying to bring back LEAVE IT TO BEAVER as a series. Sure, Universal made 100 episodes but it simply wasn't like watching the 1950s Beav. But Ole Anderson's decision to compound the Horsemen with a rival gang was like pouring salt on salt. People wanted to see a decisive Flair-Sting confrontation without the constant run-ins, threats of interference and hanging shroud of a clouded decision. To put Sting in a situation where he needed his own gang, the "Dudes with Attitudes," to fend off the Horsemen threats immediately shortcircuited his ability to be a fearless, head-and-shoulders champion who could dominate.

Gangs, in short, are an image which WERE. In any television form, revivals are usually nice for a one-shot but fade as a continuing series (THE BRADYS, THE NEW ODD COUPLE, i.e.). What went wrong with them, further, was their failure to break new ground, something sorely needed in pro wrestling.

THE HOT-SHOTS

My good friend, former Continental Wrestling Federation announcer Charlie Platt, is hardly optimistic about the future of pro wrestling and probably could have written this chapter of WHAT WENT WRONG himself. Says Charlie: "This business has hot-shotted itself to death and we may be in the final days. Nothing is new or original, people are mostly smart to the business---not because of newsletters but because the promotions don't do anything any more that has a degree of believability, and it has tried to top itself so much that people are sick of it."

I thought in 1989, I had seen it all with plastic bags and parental guidance warnings for pay-per-view shows. In 1966, I remembered Mario Galento bringing out a double-barrel shotgun to chase off the Medics in the Channel 11 studios in Atlanta during a taping of BIG TIME WRESTLING. But never did I think I would see someone try to run over another human being with a car as part of a wrestling angle.

Eddie Gilbert's and Jerry Lawler's decision for a car run-down/stuntman angle on the live WMC-TV show in Memphis over the summer was part sheer brilliance and part gratuitous excess. As far as construction of a basic wrestling angle, Gilbert's part was executed to perfection---so much so, that his own brother, in the car with him, believed Lawler was seriously injured or killed. The actual idea took wrestling almost into a literal live drama, considering the audience knew this was no taped sketch. The aftermath of the angle killed any effectiveness or believability in that, instead of remaining down on the parking lot, Lawler---dazed, but walking---revived enough to 15 minutes later, tell the studio audience, he'd be in the Monday night main event at the Mid-South Coliseum.

Gilbert told me two weeks after the angle: "We wanted to shake things up, so we were trying to think of anything to top ourselves." There, in itself, was the problem with not only the angle but with wrestling, in general, in 1990. Eventually, one reaches that limit one cannot top. Unless we were to see a live hostage situation involving guns (and heaven forbid, I hope no one takes this as a suggestion), you can't top trying to kill a man with a car. The angle did not draw a huge (1,100 paid) throng to the Mid-South the following week and has been referred to little since.

A column we wrote for MATWATCH in June 1990, "I Think I've Seen It All Before," was heavily criticized within the NWA ranks as being deliberately negative on the business. Au contraire. I think it is reflecting the view of many fans over the age of 12 in this country who are staying home in increasing droves because they have seen just about everything wrestling has to offer in the past seven years. Pre-1984, hotshot angles could be tucked away regionally and not spoiled in other portions of the country. They were saved until a genuinely high point when crowd interest was peaking and then audiences would go through the roof. Now, hotshot angles are far too frequent; run-ins became so commonplace during the Dudes-Horsemen standoffs before the Sting title win that they became a cliché; and the Earthquake injury attack on Hulk Hogan was nothing more than King Kong Bundy-Hogan, circa 1985, revisited.

In the beginning, despite the skeptics, Anderson did succeed in developing a mystery in creating The Black Scorpion. Casual fans were semi-intrigued by the weekly silhouette and the storyline proved fodder for many of the nation's wrestling radio talk shows. In fact, the prevailing question on the NWA's GREAT AMERICAN FANS JAM in the fall of 1990 was over the identity of the many Scorpions.

But coming right out of the defeat of Ric Flair, Sting's dilemma with the Scorpion, at best, should have been as short term as Flair's with Junkyard Dog from May to July. Steve Mueller of WRESTLING EYE magazine, on a recent edition of John Arezzi's PRO WRESTLING SPOTLIGHT in New York, phrased it this way: "The Black Scorpion had something going until he turned into a magician. Then, he lost all credibility. It suddenly wasn't wrestling. It was the circus."

Worse, however, was the impact the Scorpion mystery had on the image of Sting. At a time when, perhaps, WCW had a chance to market a champion with greater impact than a mediocre Ultimate Warrior, Sting should have been a fearless, invincible, heads-above-the-crowd champion. Instead, Sting deteriorated into a man scared of his own shadow. His interviews, never his strength, personified a man constantly nervous, shaken and hardly the picture of determination to fight back. The voice echoes at the end of the excessive number of Sting weekly TV matches were good for a week but became as much a cliché as Horsemen-Dudes run-ins. Some weeks, it was like having Wally Cox as a news anchor. In my perspective, the impact on Sting's image was far more a factor of what went wrong.

The Gobbledy-Gooker is almost beyond explanation and a sign of how things have declined in the World Wrestling Federation. In 1984, one might have expected this as just another character in the cartoon show. But the Gooker has smacked of a desperate attempt to force-feed a kid act that not even the kids show signs of wanting to see.

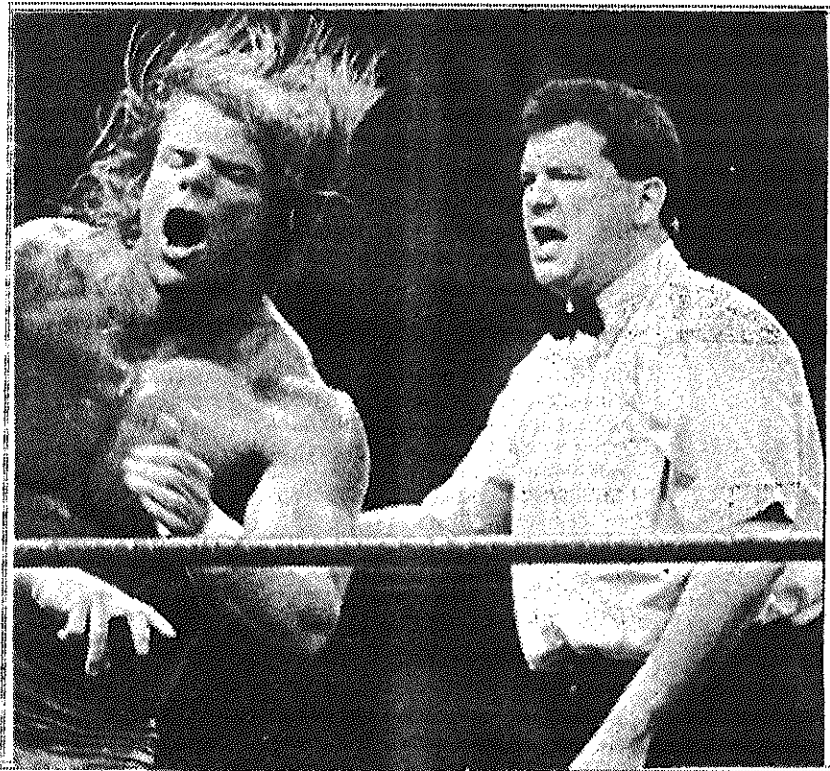
Not that the WWF did not do a good job of creating its own mystery. On a national basis, probably as many questions were asked of what was in the egg as who the Black Scorpion is. But

fans were expecting something connected to wrestling and this, simply, was not.

Listening to Roddy Piper have to oversell the non-existent crowd reaction to the Gooker was an embarrassment. But more evident is that viewers simply will not buy whatever is tossed at them today, simply because it comes from the WWF.

The audience is much more sophisticated than the "new wave" fans of 1984 and chickens aren't going to draw them back to the arenas. The WWF has already tried with Terry Taylor.

After seven years of developing the most cussed and discussed innovations in pro wrestling, even the brightest minds run dry. The Gobbledy-Gooker may be the epitome of this syndrome. Unless we are greatly fooled, which is always a possibility, the Gooker not only hatched from an egg, he laid a big one on his own.



1990: A
LONG WAY
THE DAYS
OF '85

MATWATCH TV AWARDS

Ross Tops 1990 Balloting

For the third consecutive year, WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING host Jim Ross led all balloting for the MATWATCH TV AWARDS, capturing 1,144 points to win the BEST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER honors. Ross outdistanced former WWF star Jesse (The Body) Ventura, who earned 1,025 points in coasting to selection as BEST COLOR COMMENTATOR.

Balloting was held during the months of November and December among MATWATCH subscribers with points distributed on a 5-3-1 basis for first, second and third. Voting was conducted in 19 categories for the TV wrestling year covering Dec. 1, 1989-Nov. 30, 1990. Votes were limited to television performances in the United States and Canada.

BEST BROADCAST/ CABLE TV MATCH

WINNER:

Midnight Express
vs.
Southern Boys
(World Wide)

360 Points

2. RIC FLAIR VS. BRIAN PILLMAN, World Championship, 356.
3. CURT HENNIG VS. TITO SANTANA, WWF Superstars (I-C), 349 1/2.
4. STEINER BROTHERS VS. MIDNIGHT EXPRESS, WCW, 345.
5. SCOTT STEINER VS. RIC FLAIR, World Championship, 268.
6. RIC FLAIR VS. LEX LUGER, WCW CLASH XII, 252.
7. JERRY LAWLER VS. TERRY FUNK, USWA Supercard, 120.
8. CURT HENNIG VS. HULK HOGAN, WWF/SNME, 116.
9. ROCKERS VS. HART FOUNDATION, WWF/SNME, 88.
10. RIC FLAIR VS. BUTCH REED, WCW CLASH XIII, 85 1/2.

This was the tightest balloting ever in this category and perhaps any with any of the top four matches within three first-place votes of winning it all.

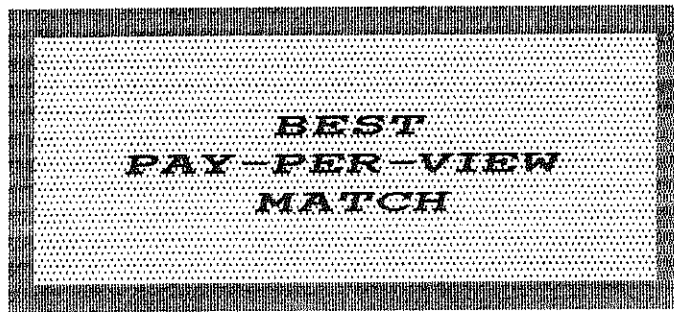
Ironically, this is the first year that the same tag teams have captured both the BEST BROADCAST/CABLE MATCH and BEST PAY-PER-VIEW MATCH honors in the same year. The Midnight-Boys confrontation on NWA WORLD WIDE WRESTLING was reminiscent of the Fantastics-Midnights match of two years previous when the Fantastics scored a 42-minute upset over Jim Cornette's team to win the U.S. tag team title. While the title was not on the line here, the Steve Armstrong-Tracy Smothers team demonstrated a combination of aerial and mat skills honed in Japan in upsetting the Express.

The runner-up Flair-Pillman battle came during the February rating sweeps on WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING as the finale of what may well have been the best WCW two-hour show of the year. The match was about a third as long but the storyline similar to the winning Flair-Sting CLASH I match of 1989 with Pillman on the verge of an upset through most of the 17 minutes and Flair hanging onto Brian's trunks for the victory. Pillman should have been propelled to a top singles contender with the match but as happened in several NWA TV matchups during 1990, the followup never ensued.

Narrowly behind in third, the Hennig-Santana affair was one of the best eight-minute showdowns ever on a WWF TV show in the finals of the Intercontinental tournament in the spring. Hennig, who earned the spotlight after a strong series against Hulk Hogan in the winter, and Santana went through a dozen two-counts in the championship match and Santana came away with renewed respect despite the loss.

Also closely bunched in fourth was the fall WCW battle between the Midnight-Steiners, which Rick and Scott captured in an abortive launch to a proposed 10-week TV series of angles and confrontations between the two teams. Likewise, this made the Midnight-Steiners the first team to ever capture three spots out of the top four BEST BROADCAST/CABLE selections.

(OTHER VOTES: Jerry Lawler vs. Austin Idol, USWA, and Arn Anderson vs. The Great Muta, WCW (tie) 80; Ric Flair vs. Lex Luger, WWW, 65; Flair/Anderson vs. Rock & Roll Express, NWA MAIN EVENT, 49; Scott Steiner vs. Bobby Eaton, WCW, 32; Eddie Gilbert vs. Jeff Jarrett, USWA/WMC, and Ric Flair vs. Ricky Morton, WWW (tie), 24; Brian Pillman vs. Buddy Landell, WCW CLASH XIII, 23; Anderson vs. Paul Orndorff, WCW CLASH XI, 16; Steve Keirn vs. Tony Anthony, USWA Supercard, 5; Six-man finale, CLASH X, 4; Ultimate Warrior vs. Rick Rude, WWF/SNME, 2; Scotty the Body vs. Ricky Santana, PORTLAND, Curt Hennig vs. Big Bossman, WWF/SNME, Anderson vs. Buzz Sawyer, NWA POWER HOUR, Norman vs. Kevin Sullivan, WCW CLASH X, Midnight Express vs. Brian Pillman/Tom Zenk, WCW, Terry Funk vs. Steve Keirn, USWA Supercard, and Hulk Hogan/Ultimate Warrior vs. Hennig/Genius Poffo, WWF/SNME (tie) 1 each.



WINNER :

**Midnight Express
vs.
Southern Boys
(BASH '91)**

640 Points

2. STEINER BROTHERS VS. NASTY BOYS, WCW HALLOWEEN HAVOC, 465.
3. HULK HOGAN VS. ULTIMATE WARRIOR, WWF WRESTLEMANIA VI, 440.
4. RIC FLAIR VS. STING, BASH: NEW REVOLUTION, 252.
5. RIC FLAIR VS. LEX LUGER, WRESTLE WAR '90, 222.
6. MIDNIGHT EXPRESS VS. ROCK & ROLL EXPRESS, WW '90, 125.
7. STEINER BROTHERS VS. ROAD WARRIORS, STARRCADE '89, 109.
8. HART FOUNDATION VS. DEMOLITION, WWF SUMMER SLAM, 100.
DOOM VS. STEINER BROTHERS, WCW CAPITOL COMBAT, 100.
10. FLAIR VS. STING, STARRCADE '89, 96.

The Midnights-Southerns BASH battle is the consensus choice as best match in the continental United States for 1990. The Midnights' victory in the 22-minute affair was considered by many the showstealer, even away from the fourth-place Sting-Flair world championship change in Baltimore. Many observers believe the Midnights looked as strong as they had in three years in the explosive confrontation and probably solidified Bobby Eaton and Stan Lane as the top tag team in America, despite some WCW management beliefs of the Midnights as passe.

A respectable second went to perhaps the most surprising match of 1990 as the Steiner Brothers defeated the Nasty Boys in Chicago. The 15-minute event was a brutal Memphis-style brawl and proved how dramatically far the Nasties had come since their lackluster pasts in the AWA, Memphis and Florida and proved to be Ole Anderson's best importation during his NWA booking regime.

The headline match of the year finished a strong third as the Hulk Hogan-Ultimate Warrior title change at WRESTLEMANIA VI provided 23 of the best-booked minutes in the history of wrestling. With 17 false endings and an emotional post-match passing of the (belt) torch, a new WWF era was signaled which is yet to catch a big spark.

This was the first of MATWATCH's three years a Ric Flair match did not make the top three in the PPV category but his loss to Sting in Baltimore to change the NWA world title and his dramatic 37-minute battle with Lex Luger at Greensboro in February finished fourth and fifth.

The Sting-Flair encounter, delayed five months because of Sting's patella tendon injury at CLASH X in Corpus Christi TX, was not as strong as the 1988 CLASH I draw and the 1989 Sting upset at STARRCADE, which finished tenth. Largely because of continued knee limitations, Sting was not as mobile and Flair often seemed to merely go through the required motions of getting the belt to Steve Borden, even using the same finish as at STARRCADE and in Flair's loss to Ricky Steamboat in February 1989.

The Luger-Flair showdown, which served as an emergency replacement for Sting-Flair at WRESTLE WAR '90, ended with Luger being counted out in 37 minutes while trying to "save" the injured Sting from an out-of-ring attack by Ole and Arn Anderson. The double storyline had Luger attempting for the third time on a pay-per-view show to wrest the belt from Flair and, mid-match, being turned back to babyface when Sting arrived at ringside and dramatically slapped Luger to spur him into a comeback.

Ironically, in this category, the strength of tag team matches on pay-cable matches registered heavily with MATWATCHers with seven of the ten top choices going to tag affairs.

(OTHER VOTES: Midnights vs. Pillman/Zenk, WCW CAPITOL COMBAT, 24; ROYAL RUMBLE finals, 9; Flair vs. Luger, CAPITOL COMBAT, and Ted DiBiase vs. Jake Roberts, WRESTLEMANIA VI, 6 each; Orient Express vs. Rockers, WRESTLEMANIA VI, Visionairies vs. Vipers, SURVIVOR SERIES IV, and Sting vs. Muta, STARRCADE '89, 1 each.)



WINNER :

**GREAT
AMERICAN
BASH:
NEW REVOLUTION
(WCW)**

556 Points

2. STARRCADE '89, WCW, December 1989, 469.
3. HALLOWEEN HAVOC, WCW, October 1990, 439.
4. CLASH X: TEXAS SHOOTOUT, WCW/TBS, February 1990, 355.
5. USWA SUPERCARD, USWA, October 1990, 336.
- WRESTLEMANIA VI, WWF, March 1990, 336.
7. ROYAL RUMBLE, WWF, January 1990, 85.

The overall balance of THE GREAT AMERICAN BASH: NEW REVOLUTION, heightened by anticipation of the NWA world title change from Ric Flair to Sting. This marked the second consecutive win for the Baltimore summer pay-cable affair and included the hot Midnight Express-Southern Boys BEST PPV MATCH winner.

Somewhat surprising, however, was the strength of STARRCADE '89, almost a year out of voters' memory and with the arguable viability of an evening-long tournament format which launched Sting's push to the NWA title and included a Steiner Brothers upset win over the Road Warriors. Early in the balloting, the October HALLOWEEN HAVOC, which served to make stars out of the Nasty Boys and sent them right into the hands of Vince McMahon, was running a tight second but the STARRCADE supporters rallied in the last week of voting. The 12-match Atlanta show saw DOOM and The Great Muta drop three matches during the evening. Muta eventually left WCW but DOOM revived at midyear to win the NWA world tag title.

Equally surprising: the strong balloting for CLASH X: TEXAS SHOOTOUT, which was helped by an extraordinary promotion campaign by TBS' Jim Claussen. Pre-SHOOTOUT on-air ads featured animated wanted posters and comedy promos of Norman and the Samoan Swat Team ("ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha") to build interest. SHOOTOUT joined CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS I (the 1988 winner) and RAGIN' CAJUN CLASH from New Orleans (1989) as non-PPV shows to make the top five.

WRESTLEMANIA garnered more than five times as much support as its 66-point finish last year as the Hogan-Warrior finale and a Ted DiBiase-Jake Roberts powerslam affair offset the longish first three hours of the show. Equally strong was the USWA SUPERCARD, broadcast on the USWA CHALLENGE syndicated series during November and December, which featured a 21-match card for the USWA heavyweight title recaptured by Jerry Lawler. The first two shows, which featured a strong Craig Johnson-Joe Pedicino-Dave Brown combo on the announce mike proved to be a better TV offering than the five-hour, 13-minute marathon in Memphis.

However, as MATWATCHer Robin Clarke of Providence wrote: "I cast my votes but it's really up for debate whether any card was really a 'supercard' because we've seen too many matches on these shows which did not really belong on pay-per-view shows. Anytime Junkyard Dog vs. Moondog Rex is on a PPV, I feel like I'm entitled to a rebate."

(OTHER VOTES: SURVIVOR SERIES IV, WWF, and WRESTLE WAR '90, WCW, 9 each; CAPITOL COMBAT, WCW, 3; and CLASH XI: COASTAL CRUSH, WCW, and SUMMER SLAM, WWF, 1 each.)



WINNER :

World
Championship
Wrestling

(TBS)

680 Points

2. WWF SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING, Syndicated, 368.
3. THE NEW USWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, WMC-TV (Memphis), 276.
USWA CHALLENGE, Syndicated, 276.
5. WWF PRIME TIME WRESTLING, USA Cable Network, 209.
6. NWA POWER HOUR, TBS, 208.
7. NWA MAIN EVENT, TBS/Syndicated, 148.
8. PORTLAND WRESTLING, local Portland TV, 64.
9. NWA WORLD WIDE WRESTLING, Syndicated, 60.
10. NWA PRO WRESTLING, Syndicated, 40.

The more MATWATCHers age, the more they amaze me. The year 1990 was arguably a much poorer one, overall, for the Saturday edition of WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING than the previous year, which was largely helmed by Jim Ross' producing. Ross did the best he could with often confusing and frequently lackluster (sometimes of the all-squash, no-angle variety) shows designed by Ole Anderson. Yet, WCW registered nearly a 2-to-1 vote margin over WWF SUPERSTARS in winning for the second consecutive year. WCW's top efforts came in a hot February show headlined by a Flair-Pillman main event and a pre-CAPITOL COMBAT edition which ended with Lex Luger decking the Four Horsemen while onstage with Ross.

SUPERSTARS, which dropped to third last year after winning in 1988, actually offered more weekly angles and a strong Intercontinental tournament in the spring. The highlight came in late spring when Hulk Hogan was "sent into retirement" by Earthquake John Tenta, followed by arguably the finest music video in the history of TV wrestling, depicting the highlights of Hogan's career.

Surprising support came for the only live local TV show left on the air, WMC-TV's THE NEW USWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, and the weekly USWA syndicated series, USWA CHALLENGE. Eddie Gilbert's stewardship as booker for the Memphis territory, preceded by a May series which led to Snowman Eddie Crawford winning the USWA title from Jerry Lawler, revived what was rumored in early

1990 to be the final days of the 90-minute Saturday morning tradition. The WMC series offered the most outrageous angle on American television during the year, Gilbert's attempt to run down Lawler in a car on the back parking lot of the NBC affiliate. However, the drama was diluted when Lawler miraculously revived enough 15 minutes later to announce, "I'll be at the Mid-South Coliseum Monday night, Eddie Gilbert." The syndicated CHALLENGE series picked up steam after shifting during the summer away from reliance on the Von Erich family and building more previously Memphis-only oriented rivalries.

(OTHER VOTES: WWF CHALLENGE, 9; LPWA, 6; USWA LEGENDS/ESPN, and KTVT CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTS (USWA), 5 each; PRO WRESTLING '90, 3; WWF ALL-AMERICAN, 1.)



WINNER :

**The
Juicer**

(WCW/Portland)

469 Points

2. CAINE, THE UNDERTAKER, WWF, 446.
3. EARTHQUAKE, WWF, 312.
4. WRESTLING SCHOOL DROPOUT, ICW, 229.
5. EL GIGANTE, WCW, 192.
6. TESSA, USWA, 177.
7. MICHAEL WALLSTREET, WCW, 175.
8. JEANNIE CLARKE, USWA, 174.
9. THE BLACK SCORPION, WCW, 56.
10. U.S. MALE, PORTLAND/GEORGIA ALL-STAR, 45.

Art Barr's silly string and Juice Patrol of kids struck enough of a nerve to propel him to the top of the newcomer category, despite the ambivalence of some MATWATCHers concerning voting for Barr in the wake of his legal problems surrounding a sex offense plea bargain in Oregon. Wrote Mark Thompson of Denver: "I just can't vote for somebody in this role, knowing what we know about him."

The impact, however, was more amazing for Mark Callaway's UNDERTAKER role, which only had one exposure before the balloting expired and was not one of

the original nominees for BEST NEW CHARACTER. Callaway, who had previously had lackluster incarnations as The Master of Pain (USWA) and Mean Mark Callous (WCW), rang the bell in his long gray coat and grim, killer expression for his SURVIVOR SERIES debut and finished only 23 points behind The Juicer.

John Tenta's Earthquake character is not a favorite of hardcore traditionalists but as Brenda Moore of Jacksonville FL told us: "I had to vote for Earthquake because this wasn't a year when a great deal of new characters meant much."

Paul E. Dangerously, in his nine-week tenure as ICW booker, created a comic character, The Wrestling School Dropout, who was strictly intended for laughs and played his role to a tee. Considering the limited exposure of ICW, it's a commentary on some of the major promotions' perceptiveness why this guy has not been picked up for a short-term run. WSD finished a respectable fourth.

WCW's El Gigante (Jorge Gonzales) smiled a lot, walked over the top rope a lot and stood over heels a lot. He engaged in less physical contact than some kickers in the National Football League but scored well enough with the voters to take fifth spot.

Interestingly, two women, both of whom had strong summer stints in the USWA, cracked the top ten---a first. Tessa, who moved from a slot as John Tatum's valet, to Bill Dundee's aide-de-camp, nudged out the Tony Schiavone-created Michael (Mike Rotunda) Wallstreet-created incarnation for sixth. Jeannie Clarke, as the ex-wife of Chris Adams, was part of a triangle angle during the USWA/Dallas summer run and captured eighth position, much to the delight of Jon Horton of Washington, D.C.

(OTHER VOTES: Kowabunga, USWA, 44; Tailor-Made Medina, Portland, 7; Saba Simba, WWF, and Fabian, PW '90, 6; J.W. Storm, WCW, 5; Tugboat, WWF, 4; Big Cat (Curtis Hughes), WCW, and Power & Glory, WWF, 3 each; Battlekat, WWF, Demolition Crush, WWF, Little Richard Marley, WCW, and Texas Hangmen, AWA, 1 each.



WINNER :

**Jim
Ross**

(WCW)

1,144 Points

2. CHRIS CRUISE, NWA WORLD WIDE/LPWA, 345
3. TONY SCHIAVONE, WWF CHALLENGE/NWA WORLD WIDE/MAIN EVENT, 285.
4. LANCE RUSSELL, NWA PRO, 228.
5. VINCE McMAHON JR., WWF SUPERSTARS/CHALLENGE/SNME, 224.
6. CRAIG JOHNSON, USWA, 160.
7. DAVE BROWN, USWA/WMC-TV, 69.
8. JOE PEDICINO, PRO WRESTLING '90, 60.
9. DON COSS, PORTLAND, 35.
10. MICK KARCH, IWA, 10.

The testimony to Ross' unquestioned dominance in this category is in the overwhelming margin he received in the midst of a downslide of an NWA year and an extraordinary lack of quality angles for Jim to turn up the heat at the mike during the weekly series. In fact, on one horrible edition of rerun matches during a July POWER HOUR, Ross admittedly sounded as bored as many of the viewers, which took little to match. However, Ross again proved he has no peer when the big matches develop. Ross' top calls of the year: 1) the Flair-Sting title change in Baltimore; 2) the Flair-Luger WRESTLE WAR confrontation; and 3) the intensity of the six-man cage match which actually saw The Great Muta's team cheered after the Horsemen turn on Sting. Perhaps his most amazing announce job ever came during the disastrous CLASH XIII: THANKSGIVING THUNDER when he and Paul E. Dangerously teamed to hold viewer interest within the context of the matches without overselling what wasn't there.

The ups and downs of pro wrestling are epitomized by this year's runner-up, who began the year as the most promising newcomer to the microphone in several years and ended 1990 out of the industry. Chris Cruise, whose low-key, workmanlike mikeside manner and Summerall/Madden-like teaming with Terry Funk on NWA WORLD WIDE WRESTLING, built a subtle and steady following during the year before his and Funk's walkout from WCW in the spring (see TOP 15 NEWS STORIES). Cruise had a short run on the cable version of the women's LPWA circuit, teaming with Ashley Kennedy in the fall.

Tony Schiavone, the perennial runner-up to Ross, fell to third this year, likely because of his reduced visibility in his return to WCW as host/producer of WORLD WIDE WRESTLING. Schiavone, whose finest call came in February as play-by-play announcer for the WWF ROYAL RUMBLE, left Titan Sports shortly thereafter because of high living expenses for his family in the New York area.

Lance Russell, who continues his steady work in a revived three-man combination with the Freebirds on the rechristened WCW PRO WRESTLING, maintained his top five standing, finishing just below Schiavone, and WWF boss Vince McMahon, Jr., fell from last year's fourth to fifth, despite a steady year. McMahon's efforts have arguably been diluted since Jesse Ventura's departure in late summer as a teaming with Roddy Piper has not generated the same chemistry and a recent McMahon-Piper-Honky Tonk Man combo threw the usually solid WWF commentary timing off its usual pace.

The top newcomer for 1990 is USWA's Craig Johnson, who came from a career as a mainline sports announcer for Home Team Sports (Johnson voices the George Washington University basketball games on HTS). Johnson, who had a midyear debut as replacement for the veteran Mark Lowrance, finished sixth, two slots above the first-year Cruise's eighth-place spot last year. Johnson has emerged as the odds-on favorite as the next major mike star in the business, particularly if Joe Pedicino's Global effort has a successful launch.

(OTHER VOTES: Mark Lowrance, USWA, 7; Gorilla Monsoon, WWF, 4; Coach Kurt, Motor City Wrestling, 1.)

**BEST
COLOR
COMMENTATOR**

WINNER :

Jesse
Ventura

(WWF)

1,025 Points

2. PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY, WCW POWER HOUR/WPIX NWA PRO, 417 5/6.
3. JIM CORNETTE, WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 296 1/3.
4. BOBBY HEENAN, WWF CHALLENGE/PRIME TIME, 224 1/3.
5. RODDY PIPER, WWF SUPERSTARS, 164.
6. JERRY LAWLER, THE NEW USWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 136.
7. THE FREEBIRDS, NWA PRO WRESTLING, 120.

Without doubt, Jesse Ventura is the most missed personality in television wrestling. Ventura coasted to a 3-to-1 victory over his nearest competitor in capturing the color award for the second time in three years (Jim Cornette scored the upset last year). Ventura, who left the WWF in a dispute with Vince McMahon over a merchandising contract, was elected mayor of his home suburb of Minneapolis in November and is currently in production for a new fall series, *THE GRUDGE MATCH*, which will take *PEOPLE'S COURT*-like disputes into actual physical combat. But Ventura left his mark during 1990 with his intense analysis of the Hulk Hogan-Ultimate Warrior *WRESTLEMANIA VI* finale and his classic line, "Hulkamania just may live forever," at signoff.

Paul E. Dangerously, who was in, out and in again as co-host of the *NWA POWER HOUR*, vaulted to a second place finish. Dangerously, who has mellowed the hard edge of his character to adapt to the weekly mike chores, has formed wrestling's top announce tandem with Jim Ross, thanks to the Ventura exit.

Cornette, who along with Dangerously and other *WCW* heel commentators was displaced from his color role on *WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING* in June by booker Ole Anderson, still mustered enough strength to finish third. Cornette's two top performances were during *CLASH X: TEXAS SHOOTOUT* in analyzing the Horsemen turn against Sting and during *STARRCADE '89's* Ironteam tournament. Corny is now starring as analyst with Joe Pedicino on the *LPWA* series.

Bobby Heenan has continued in a steady role as co-host of *PRIME TIME WRESTLING* and *WWF WRESTLING CHALLENGE* as foil for Gorilla Monsoon, enough for viewers to vote him fourth. His memorable performance in 1990 came during a fall angle when Big Bossman (Ray Traylor) dragged Heenan to ringside and handcuffed him to the guard rail from the *CHALLENGE* announce booth in retaliation for Heenan's insults against "Bossman's mother."

(OTHER VOTES: Dutch Mantel, *WORLD WIDE*, 100 1/2; Scotty the Body, *PORTLAND*, 89 1/2; Bob Caudle, *WCW*, 61; Joe Pedicino, *USWA*, 25 1/2; Terry Funk, *WORLD WIDE*, 19; Nick Bockwinkel, *LPWA*, 5; Lord Alfred Hayes, *WWF PRIME TIME*, Michael Hayes, *WCW PRO*, and Jonathan Holliday, *PORTLAND*, 1 each.)



WINNER :

**NASTY
BOYS**

(WCW)

949 Points

RISING STAR OF THE YEAR

2. THE JUICER, WCW/PORTLAND, 388.
 3. THE DESTRUCTION CREW, AWA/WCW (as Wrecking Crew), 285.
 4. EARTHQUAKE, WWF, 176.
 5. JEFF GAYLORD, USWA, 125.
 6. TUGBOAT, WWF, 120.
 7. EL GIGANTE, WCW, 72.
 8. CAINE THE UNDERTAKER, WWF, 52.
 9. CHRIS WALKER, PRO WRESTLING '90, 48.
 10. STUNNING STEVE AUSTIN, USWA, 44.
- SCOTTY THE BODY, Portland, 44.

Brian Knobbs and Jerry Saganovich began the year continuing to languish in the almost invisible Florida FWF promotion which disappeared from television before the year had half-ended. But the Nasty Boys' success, in our view, stems from, while being characters, their ability to be the only team to plug into the same type of role Ole and Gene Anderson once played. The Nasties were mean and enjoyed it and portrayed a brutal style in the fashion of the Andersons, something into which the WCW booker could relate. Their six months in WCW as counterpoint to the Steiner Brothers led them to a WWF berth.

Art Barr's Juicer character zipped to enormous popularity with children and had he not been thrust into the role so quickly after his legal problems in Oregon, The Juicer could have rivaled Sting in crossover popularity.

While they ended the year in Japan, Mike Enos and Wayne Bloom, virtual unknowns the year before, parlayed their Destruction Crew team into the next-to-last AWA world tag team champions and earned themselves a short-term role as the masked Wrecking Crew in WCW.

John Tenta as Earthquake enjoyed a spotlight he never knew as a Japanese preliminary performer and propelled into the year's key WWF angle as the man who "nearly ended Hulk Hogan's career." The 'Quake role, however, will likely be a one-year wonder unless McMahon attempts a Hogan-'Quake rematch during 1991 to end in an eventual pinfall for Hogan.

USWA's Jeff Gaylord, who fluctuated between heel and babyface three times during 1990, began the year as an attempted Steve Williams clone as The Missouri Tiger, emphasizing his former football skills, but finished shifting into a rope-shaking, ring-jumping Ultimate Warrior offshoot without the face paint.

(OTHER VOTES: Scott Steiner, WCW, 8; Shane Douglas, WCW/WWF, and J.W. Storm, WCW, 7 each; Southern Boys, WCW, Rex King, USWA, Little Richard Marley, WCW, DOOM, WCW, Freebirds, WCW, Missy Hyatt, WCW, and Fabian, PRO WRESTLING

'90, 5 each; Paul Roma, WWF, Eddie Gilbert, USWA, Sid Vicious, WCW, Buddy Rose, WWF, and Cactus Jack Manson, WCW/UWF/IWA, 3 each; Steven Dane, USWA, 2; The Trooper, AWA, and Steve Armstrong, WCW, 1 each.



WINNER :

**Hulk
Hogan**

**"Passing the
Belt to Ultimate
Warrior"**

629 Points

2. EDDIE GILBERT, "The Hit and Run of Jerry Lawler," USWA, 337.
3. BOBBY HEENAN, "Big Bossman Handcuffs the Brain," WWF, 335.
4. VINCE McMAHON JR., "Aftermath of Earthquake Attack on Hulk Hogan," WWF SUPERSTARS, 292.
5. JIM CORNETTE/NICK PATRICK, "Fingerpointing and Shadowboxing," WRESTLE WAR '90, 290 1/2.
6. STING, "The Slap of Lex Luger," WRESTLE WAR '90, 250 1/2.
7. JIM ROSS, play-by-play of Sting winning NWA title, 213.
8. TERRY FUNK, "Norman Plays WIN, LOSE or DRAW," FUNK'S GRILL, 176.

In the past two years, we've had a category called MOST MEMORABLE TV MOMENT. Few viewers have not put a freeze-frame of the tearful Hulk Hogan, seconds after being pinned by The Ultimate Warrior, walking to ringside at the Toronto Skydome, taking the WWF championship belt and passing it to the Warrior with an emotional hug in the center of the ring. It ended the most spectacular era in wrestling history and cemented Hogan's name as the most popular ever in the game. So strong was the post-match that WWF announcers spent so much time dwelling on it in succeeding weeks, the Warrior's title victory was almost extinguished.

Eddie Gilbert's determination to kill Jerry Lawler in the now-infamous Memphis hit-and-run angle was preluded by his being "kicked out" of the WMC-TV building for his conduct moments prior to the angle. A hand-held camera followed Gilbert through the hallways onto the parking lot, a perfect foreshadowing of the incident to come. Gilbert climbed into brother Doug's car, revved the engine and proceeded to hit an oncoming Lawler, who was trying to assist the fallen Eddie Marlin, whom Gilbert pummeled to the asphalt before

entering the car. Lawler took a stuntman's fall and the initial impact of seeing it on live television caused Eddie's brother Doug to remark as the Gilberts drove away, "Eddie, I think you've killed him." Lawler lived.

Heenan's intense agony at being dragged down the aisle by Bossman again reminded viewers how strong a personality the Brain remains. McMahon's profuse barking of orders to "get him out of here," referring to attendants to the fallen Hogan after the Earthquake angle, was followed by a masterful studio-dubbed "depressed" McMahon returning to the mike feigning sadness over the "apparent end" to Hogan's career to perfection.

Cornette and Patrick's comic exchange in the midst of a Midnight Express-Rock & Roll Express match at WRESTLE WAR was one of two moments which saved an otherwise lackluster night. The momentous slap by Sting of Lex Luger, which revived the weakened U.S. champion in his challenge to Flair and cemented his turn back to a babyface, drew strong support, particularly from people who saw the show live in Greensboro.

(OTHER VOTES: JERRY LAWLER, "The Hit-and-Run of Jerry Lawler," USWA/WMC, and BILLY JACK HAYNES, "The Insult of Portland Fans," PORTLAND, 8 each; BROTHER LUV, "Dissolving Brother Brain of His Sins," WWF, BUDDY ROSE, "Blowaway," WWF, NASTY BOYS, "The Attack on the Steiners," HALLOWEEN HAVOC, and STING, "Reaction to the Black Scorpion," CLASH XIII, 5 each; AL MADRIL, "The Fiesta Garden," PORTLAND, JIM CORNETTE, "Analysis of the Horsemen Turn," CLASH X, DUSTIN RHODES, "At Ringside Between DiBiase and Virgil," WWF/SNME, 3 each; THE BLACK SCORPION, "Halloween Havoc Illusions," HALLOWEEN HAVOC, LANCE RUSSELL, "Arguing with Teddy Long," NWA PRO; PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY, "Paul E. Meets Motor City Madman," 1 each.

**BEST
TELEVISION
PERSONALITY**

Winner:

**RIC
FLAIR**

(WCW)

561 1/2 Points

2. JESSE VENTURA, WWF, 452.
3. JIM CORNETTE, WCW, 400.
4. PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY, ICW/WCW, 209.
5. BOBBY HEENAN, WWF, 200.

6. EDDIE GILBERT, WCW/USWA, 153.
7. HULK HOGAN, WWF, 141 1/2
8. JIM ROSS, WCW, 128.
9. ARN ANDERSON, WCW, 113 1/2.
10. JERRY LAWLER, 108.

This was perhaps the most surprising result of all. Flair, who has finished third in each of the last two ballotings for BEST TV PERSONALITY, had perhaps his worst year ever in interviews, many of them which sounded like reruns of every television spot Flair has presented in the last ten years. Few original lines, continued cliches such as "to be the man, you've gotta beat the man." In fact, not until his strong performance in the December kidnaping angle with Teddy Long (after the balloting period) did Flair demonstrate much of his old magic. Yet, the NWA veteran scored a solid victory in the personality category.

Jesse Ventura may well have taken the honor had he not left the WWF in August. Ventura was a strong second in the voting and has left wrestling as probably its second most marketable mainline personality, next to Hogan.

Cornette, who won this award in 1988 and was a close runner-up to Terry Funk last year, suffered from being almost invisible during the summer and fall on WCW interviews. At least four times before his November departure, Cornette was not even seen on WCW shows, an outrage to loyalists who often tuned in over the years simply to hear the Louisville Lip's comic routines. His LOUISVILLE SLUGGER segment regularly reduced Cornette to the role of a mikeholder and diluted his usual barbs and retorts. In 1990, you would not have heard Cornette offering, "Bush and Quayle...reminds me of a companion magazine to FIELD & STREAM!"

Dangerously was one of only five personalities scoring over 200 points and if he remains in a strong color role on WCW shows in 1991, he stands a strong chance to vault to the top of this category, based on his softening the abrasive edges of the Paul E. character. Mr. Heyman's mother may even watch him this year.

Heenan has developed a loyal following which remain steady. His fifth-place finish is up from seventh a year ago and he continues to be the centerpiece of the weekly USA PRIME TIME WRESTLING series on Monday nights.

(OTHER VOTES: Road Warrior Hawk, WCW/WWF, 71; Roddy Piper, WWF, 64; Rick Steiner, WCW, 48; Scotty the Body, PORTLAND, 40; Theodore R. Long, WCW, 7; Sid Vicious, WCW, 5; Dave Brown, USWA, Joe Pedicino, USWA/PW '90; Stan Lane, WCW; and Missy Hyatt, WCW, 3 each; Terry Funk, USWA/WCW; Michael Hayes, WCW; Larry Zbyszko, AWA; Sting, WCW; Ox Baker, WCW; and Christopher Thomas Cruise, WCW/LPWA, 1 each.)



WINNER :

Sid
Vicious
vs.
Nightstalker

WCW CLASH XIII

350 Points

2. DINO BRAVO VS. NIKOLI VOLKOFF, WWF PRIME TIME, 325.
3. MIKE SHARPE VS. S.D. JONES, WWF PRIME TIME, 249.
4. MAGNUM FORCE VS. GREG SAWYER/SCOTTY WILLIAMS, WCW, 205.
5. RIC FLAIR VS. JUNKYARD DOG, WCW CLASH XII, 204.
6. DUTCH MANTLE VS. JUNKYARD DOG, WCW, 144.
- WARLORD VS. KOKO B. WARE, WWF PRIME TIME, 144.
8. SGT. SLAUGHTER VS. RUSSIAN BRUTE, AWA, 117.
9. LEX LUGER VS. MOTOR CITY MADMAN, WCW CLASH XIII, 105.
10. TOMMY RICH VS. WILD BILL IRWIN, WCW, 104.

If there was any testimony to MATWATCHers' perception of bad, this was it. A total of 40 matches received votes in this category and balloter Charlie Greene of Cairo GA wrote: "There had to be at least 100 bad ones. I just can't remember them all."

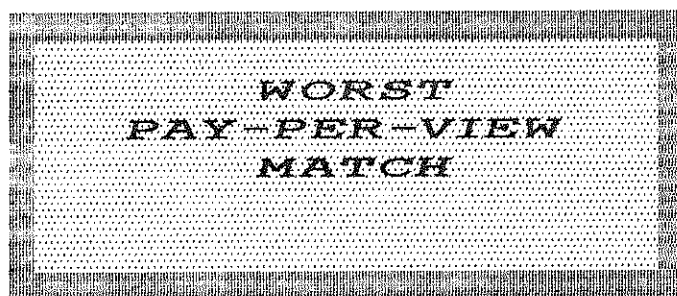
The Vicious-Nightstalker match may have been the worst nationally-televised WCW or NWA match in history. A colossal conundrum of missed moves, weak blow-connections and inexperience exposed this embarrassment of a matchup on a WCW CLASH and highlighted why THANKSGIVING THUNDER rates the worst live supercard ever produced by the senior circuit.

The Bravo-Volkoff confrontation again raises serious questions about why Dino Bravo continues to get significant pushes within the WWF. Volkoff is perhaps a decade past his prime and other than an occasional suplex, Bravo's most demonstrated talent is in raising his fist after a victory.

When Sharpe and Jones met in a late fall WWF PRIME TIME event which ran for 14 minutes, I had no question why PTW had dropped in the Nielsens. This is one of those matches like the kind Dusty Rhodes would book for WCW TV when many of the regulars were scheduled for LEARNING THE ROPES guest shots.

The Magnum Force match was the only one for these imports from Windy City Wrestling. Ole Anderson fired them on the spot and placed the Ring Lords in the Magnum Force role. JYD-Flair epitomized how far down Anderson was reaching for an audience and may have been Flair's all-time worst TV match.

(OTHER VOTES: Jeannie Clarke vs. Toni Adams, USWA, 68; Moondog Rex vs. Tommy Angel, WCW, 65; Larry Zbyszko vs. Harley Race, AWA, 60; Sid Vicious vs. Bobby Eaton, NWA MAIN EVENT, 56; Jimmy Valiant vs. Eddie Gilbert, USWA SUPERCARD, 44; Dick Slater vs. Jeff Gaylord, USWA SUPERCARD, 40; Moondog Rex vs. Rich, WCW, and Master Blasters vs. Tim Horner/Brad Armstrong, WCW CLASH XI, 8 each; African match, WCW CLASH XIII, Kevin Von Erich vs. Angel of Death, USWA, B. Brian Blair vs. Spitball Patterson, UWF, 6 each; AWA TEAM CHALLENGE finals, AWA, Dusty Rhodes vs. Randy Savage, WWF/SMME, Any PAN AM match, PAN AM, Scott Norton vs. Grappler, PORTLAND, Mike Enos vs. Trooper, AWA, and Nikoli Volkoff vs. Boris Zhukov, WWF, 5 each; Warlord vs. Jim Brunzell, WWF/PTW, 4; Steven Dane vs. Bubba Fangman, USWA, Jim Duggan vs. Earthquake, WWF, Davey Meltzer vs. Steve Williams, UWF, Tom Zenk vs. Paul Lee, WCW, Billy Black/Mr. Wrestling vs. Hillbillies, PW'90, and Tom Zenk vs. Brian Lee, WCW CLASH XIII, 3 each; Barbarian vs. Battlekat, WWF PRIME TIME, Billy Black vs. John Michaels, PW'90, Russian Brute vs. Curtis Hughes, IWA, Sgt. Slaughter vs. Nikoli Volkoff, WWF MAIN EVENT (NBC), and Ron Ritchie/partner vs. Bowlers, CNWA, 1 each.



WINNER :

Junkyard Dog
vs.
Moondog Rex

HALLOWEEN HAVOC

636 Points

2. PAUL ELLERING VS. THEODORE R. LONG, CAPITOL COMBAT, 436.
3. JIM DUGGAN VS. DINO BRAVO, WRESTLEMANIA VI, 329.
4. HULK HOGAN/BRUTUS BEEFCAKE VS. ZEUS/RANDY SAVAGE, NO HOLDS BARRED: THE MATCH/THE MOVIE, 193.
5. IRON SHEIK VS. MIKE ROTUNDA, CAPITOL COMBAT, 180.
6. WARLORD VS. TITO SANTANA, SUMMER SLAM, 176.
7. EARTHQUAKE VS. HERCULES HERNANDEZ, WRESTLEMANIA VI, 173.
8. BAD NEWS BROWN VS. RODDY PIPER, WRESTLEMANIA VI, 125.
9. DEMOLITION VS. ANDRE THE GIANT/HAKU, WRESTLEMANIA VI, 116.
10. FREEBIRDS VS. TOM ZENK/BRIAN PILLMAN, WRESTLE WAR '90, 96.

Annually, one match appears to stick out as the archetype of a contest which has no business being on a pay-per-view card. Ironically, for a promotion which typically produces the best quality pay-cable shows, WCW has hauled off

this award two consecutive years. Last year's Tommy Rich-Cuban Assassin HALLOWEEN HAVOC clinker was succeeded by a candidate in the "worst ever" category. A genius was not needed to predict disaster when the JYD-Moondog Rex "battle of the dogs" was announced. It lived down to its billing in every way in a three-minute concession purchase event which ended with an abrupt JYD headbutt. In Chicago, this was as dead as people who have stayed under too long in Lake Michigan.

In 1989, a Paul E. Dangerously-Jim Cornette managers' battle provided everything a non-wrestler ring war should offer: comedy, a Superman comeback by Cornette and a clean finish. It even rated a POWERSLAM-PLUS from MATWATCH. The only merciful thing about Theodore R. Long vs. Paul Ellering in a boxing match is at the two minutes when it ended. No pun, no fun, glad it was done.

Further, if he's still in the promotion next year, you can bet a WWF Dino Bravo match will make the top five of this category. His woeful meeting with Jim Duggan was enough to make a cat litter box smell fragrant.

The videotaped solo event of NO HOLDS BARRED: THE MATCH/THE MOVIE was Tiny Lister's swan song as Zeus and the Hogan/Beefcake team's victory was about as monotonous as the program-length commercial to blast cable systems considering not carrying the ROYAL RUMBLE.

The Sheik-Rotunda event was not evidence that Mike wasn't good but clear in how bad the Iron Sheik is. Considering the fact that the Sheik had not even been seen on TV in the weeks leading up to CAPITOL COMBAT, the only salvation was in his doing a clean job for Rotunda.

(OTHER VOTES: Dusty Rhodes vs. Randy Savage, SUMMER SLAM, 80; Doug Furnas vs. Dutch Mantel, BASH '90, 55; Jake Roberts vs. Bad News Brown, SUMMER SLAM, 52; Alliance vs. Mercenaries, SURVIVOR SERIES, 8; Freebirds vs. Renegade Warriors, HALLOWEEN HAVOC, 6; Roddy Piper vs. Dino Bravo, SNME, and Lex Luger vs. Ric Flair, CAPITOL COMBAT, 5 each; Rock & Roll Express vs. DOOM, CAPITOL COMBAT, Master Blasters vs. Southern Boys, HALLOWEEN HAVOC, Jim Duggan/Nikolai Volkoff vs. Orient Express, SUMMER SLAM, and Rhodes/Sapphire vs. Savage/Sherri Martel, WRESTLEMANIA VI, 3 each; Bill Irwin vs. Terry Taylor, HALLOWEEN HAVOC, and SURVIVOR SERIES finale, 1 each.)



WINNER :

**NO HOLDS
BARRED:
THE MATCH/
THE MOVIE**

856 Points

2. CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS XIII: THANKSGIVING THUNDER, WCW, 504.
3. SUMMER SLAM, WWF, 269.
4. CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS XI: COASTAL CRUSH, WCW, 268.
5. SURVIVOR SERIES IV, WWF, 228.
6. CAPITOL COMBAT: RETURN OF ROBOCOP, WCW, 193.
7. WRESTLEMANIA VI, WWF, 184.
8. CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS XII: FALL BRAWL, WCW, 60.

I had some observers question me why the winning event was even listed as a nominee. "It wasn't really a 'supercard,' and it wasn't the same as a WRESTLEMANIA or SUMMER SLAM," said one of my closest friends in the wrestling industry. Why? People had to pay \$11.95 for a marginal movie and a bad match. Two, it was promoted as if it were the second coming and the final showdown between Hulk Hogan and Zeus in the Hogan/Beefcake-Zeus/Savage match. "I still can't believe I actually paid \$12 for that thing," writes Jeff Cleary of Greenville NC.

But for "conventional" supercards, the overwhelming vote for CLASH XII: THANKSGIVING THUNDER should say something to WCW. Despite a classic Ric Flair-Butch Reed match and a strong Brian Pillman-Buddy Landell affair, this one was reminiscent of the aroma of Gilman Paper Company near Jacksonville. The fact that the show was too late to get on the original MATWATCH TV AWARDS ballot further amplified MATWATCHers' ire with the big write-in.

SUMMER SLAM, which drew a \$12 million pay-per-view audience and bored many of them in an off-night for WWF production and showcasing, a turnabout from the 1989 SLAM, which only drew 3 points in the WORST OF... category.

COASTAL CRUSH might have survived as much bad blood had it not been capped by the Junkyard Dog-Ric Flair finale, which insulted many MATWATCHers in JYD being pushed within a DQ win of the NWA title after walking out on doing a job for The Great Muta in the opener of 1989's WRESTLE WAR.

SURVIVOR SERIES, coming as late as it does in the voting period, often does not register strong balloting. But the revised format with a "match of

survival" in the finale did not save the show from nailing down fifth spot in the category of infamy.

(OTHER VOTES: ROYAL RUMBLE, WWF, 6; GREAT AMERICAN BASH: NEW REVOLUTION, WCW, 3; and HALLOWEEN HAVOC, WCW, and CLASH X: TEXAS SHOOTOUT, WCW, 1 each.)



WINNER :

**AWA
CHAMPIONSHIP
WRESTLING**

548 Points

2. INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 240.
3. WWF ALL-AMERICAN WRESTLING, USA Cable, 216.
4. WWF WRESTLING CHALLENGE, Syndicated, 144.
5. WWF WRESTLING SPOTLIGHT, Syndicated, 125.
6. UNIVERSAL WRESTLING FEDERATION, Sports Channel America, 120.
7. SOUTHEASTERN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 96.
8. NWA WORLD WIDE WRESTLING, Syndicated, 89.
9. WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, TBS, 80.
- CNWA, The Sports Network (Canada), 80.

Verne Gagne's epitaph may read: I REGRET THAT I ONLY HAVE ONE MORE RERUN TO GIVE MY CABLE NETWORK. Closing the year with five months of reruns on its weekly ESPN slot and led on regional sports cable by one of the top finishers for WORST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER, AWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING was a better than 2-to-1 choice as the worst weekly outing in pro wrestling. It was the AWA's second consecutive victory, headlined by an ill-produced TEAM CHALLENGE series which was difficult to follow on a weekly basis, never caught on and was high-

lighted by regular "accidental" victories by Jake (The Milkman) Milliman.

Then there is the group which offered nine airings of Tony Atlas losing the ICW championship belt to Vic Steamboat. INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING began 1990 with some sizzling low-budget shows booked by Paul Heyman and actu-

ally demonstrated improved production values. But the memory which has stuck in many Northeast voters' and tape traders' minds is the program deteriorating into a series of reruns, which included old CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING FROM FLORIDA matches and some contests at least seven years old.

The next three slots going to WWF shows is indicative of newsletter subscribers who have a predominant bent toward more action wrestling, rather than characterizations. But the bad team of Gene Okerlund and Hillbilly Jim on ALL-AMERICAN WRESTLING made frequent poor matches seem even worse. Complaints about CHALLENGE appear puzzling, since Bobby Heenan had one of his stronger years at mikeside. Several voters indicated their votes for SPOTLIGHT simply because it was a rerun series.

Herb Abrams' UNIVERSAL WRESTLING FEDERATION FURY HOUR has not been seen by enough MATWATCHers to be a major contender but those who did vote for it resoundingly did so. "It could have had the best matches in America and having to listen to Herb was enough to call the whole hour THE MAALOX MOMENT," said MATWATCH West Coast correspondent Chris Crosby.

The ambivalence of perception is clearly evident in WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING making the Top 10 list of the WORST OF... as well as winning the BEST WEEKLY SERIES category. Two years ago, when WCW---in the last year of its first Dusty Rhodes era---was voted the WORST WEEKLY SERIES, it also finished fourth in the BEST OF... voting.

(OTHER VOTES: NWA MAIN EVENT, TBS, 77; WWF SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING, 72; WINDY CITY WRESTLING and IWA WRESTLING, 56 each; NWA POWER HOUR, TBS, and USWA LEGENDS, ESPN, 40 each; WWF PRIME TIME WERESTLING, USA Cable, 9; LPWA and NWA PRO WRESTLING, 8 each; G.L.O.W. (reruns), PAN AM WRESTLING, WESTERN WRESTLING ALLIANCE, 5 each; PORTLAND WRESTLING, 4; NAWA WRESTLING, 3; PRO WRESTLING '90, USWA CHALLENGE, 2 each; PWF/FLORIDA WRESTLING, 1.)



WINNER :

Herb
Abrams

(UWF)

588 Points

2. RINGSIDE RALPH STRANGIS, AWA ALL-STAR WRESTLING, 477.
3. MARC LOWRANCE, USWA CHALLENGE/KTVT CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTS, 316.
4. ED WHALEN, CNWA, 248.
5. LEE MARSHALL, IWA WRESTLING, 180.
6. J.C. CARSON, SOUTHEASTERN CHAMPIONSHIP, 129.
7. GORILLA MONSOON, WWF CHALLENGE/PRIME TIME, 100.

WORST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

8. JOHN HEATH, PWF/FLORIDA WRESTLING, 62.
9. VINCE McMAHON JR., WWF SUPERSTARS, 61.
10. SEAN MOONEY, WWF PRIME TIME, 48.

Last year, we said we could apparently retire David Crockett from annually winning this dubious honor simply because he wouldn't be on the air in 1990 (let's hope Dusty Rhodes doesn't get any ideas on his TBS return). But the man who told reporters in New York he was bringing in Bruiser Brody to wrestle and Blackjack Mulligan to book roosts at the bottom of the heap in 1991, based on 13 weeks on SPORTS CHANNEL AMERICA as lead announcer of his UWF. "To say Herb is an embarrassment is like saying Jell-O wobbles," is the view of California MATWATCHer Ernie Harper.

Abrams' late rally outdistanced the AWA's Ralph Strangis, who probably appeared worse than he really was after being saddled with Greg Gagne as a color comentator.

Lowrance, who was only a middle-of-the-pack also-ran last year, vaulted to the runner-down spot in his final half-year as top USWA mike man. Lowrance, who does have a following among some Tennessee MATWATCHers, epitomized his own plight during a Chris Adams match when Adams was clobbered by a Coke bottle and Lowrance proclaimed: "HE----MAY----BE----DEAD!" That was MATWATCHer Dick Bourne's favorite line of all time.

The only reason Whalen dropped from second to fourth this year has to be his declining exposure. He appeared on the closing weeks of CNWA's TSN run and the show was canceled. Ed was as much luck to CNWA as Jim Bakker was to the PTL.

Marshall, who early in Ted Turner's ownership of the NWA was considered a candidate for WORLD WIDE WRESTLING, deteriorated during his short IWA run and did some of his worst mike work ever. Carson, who is now a cult figure among newsletter subscribers who have never seen the former local Chattanooga series, butchers the King's English worse than Ray Candy and Sir Samuel F. Kent combined. In a late series move to salvage interest, Carson was turned into a heel host and was even worse. Take my word for it, if you saw SOUTHEASTERN, you may have had a hard time choosing between J.C. and Herb for the worst.

(OTHER VOTES: Tim Dix, SOUTHERN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 9; Jim Ross, WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 7; Craig Johnson, USWA CHALLENGE, 6; Lance Russell, NWA PRO WRESTLING, and Gwen Brown, PAN AM WRESTLING, 5 each; Frank Dusek, SOUTH ATLANTIC WRESTLING, and Bob Dow, ICW, 1 each.)



WINNER :

**Thunderbolt
Patterson**

(WCW)

649 1/3 Points

2. HILLBILLY JIM, WWF ALL-AMERICAN WRESTLING, 591 1/3.
3. VERNE GAGNE, AWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 300.
4. JACK BRICKHOUSE, WGN NWA PRO WRESTLING, 256.
5. GREG GAGNE, AWA ALL-STAR WRESTLING, 136.
6. TOMMY RICH, WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 92.
7. OLE ANDERSON, WORLD WIDE WRESTLING, 80.
8. DOWNTOWN BRUNO, THE NEW USWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 60.
9. BRUNO SAMMARTINO, UWF FURY HOUR, 52.
10. LORD ALFRED HAYES, WWF PRIME TIME WRESTLING, 48.

"Awww, come on, he wasn't really a color commentator," said the same friend who questioned our including NO HOLDS BARRED: THE MATCH/THE MOVIE in the WORST SUPERCARD category. The friend was absolutely right: Thunderbolt Patterson was indeed no color commentator. His three stints at the color mike with Jim Ross and Bob Caudle on WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING had to be one of the most painful experiences Ross has ever had and he once had to call a Paul Jones-Ivan Koloff match. "I think he have all the tools to be a rassler," was one typical analysis of Thunderbolt concerning Scott Steiner. Ole Anderson's re-inflicting of T'bolt on us was enough to make us pine for a diet of Superstar Billy Graham's "bruh-thuh."

Hillbilly Jim is not a bad person, he's not an unfriendly person. He just isn't an announcer. Although the recent December tryout of Honky Tonk Man is comparably unfavorable, Jim ran T'bolt a close race until the last 25 votes were mailed.

Verne, who wrested the crown away from Graham last year, really didn't get on our nerves much during 1990 because he stayed away from the mike most of the time. But when he picked one up, it was like rubbing an Oral-B toothbrush against a bleeding gum.

Wrestling analyst Jeff Bowdren loves to lampoon Jack Brickhouse's Gotch and Hackenschmidt routine. Brickhouse is one of the legendary baseball announcers and in my forthcoming book on the 50 years of television wrestling, he figures regularly in the early days of ABC network ring shows. But that was in 1950.

Ol' Jack never left that era and after hearing his ramblings during HALLOWEEN HAVOC, it made me thankful we are not offered WGN on cable here.

And, of course, one cannot leave behind the final triple-digit scorer, Greg Gagne, who often sings new lyrics to the song Que Sera Sera: "When I was just a little boy, I asked my father, what will I be? Will I be boring? Will I be bald?...."

(OTHER VOTES: Bulldog Bob Brown, CNWA, and Roddy Piper, WWF, 9 each; Ralph Strangis (did he do color?), 5; Joe Pedicino, USWA, and Jonathan Holliday, PORTLAND, 3 each; Diamond Dallas Page, PWF/IWA, Ricky Morton, WCW, Terrence Garvin, USWA, 1 each.)



WINNER :

**Sama (Saba)
Simba**

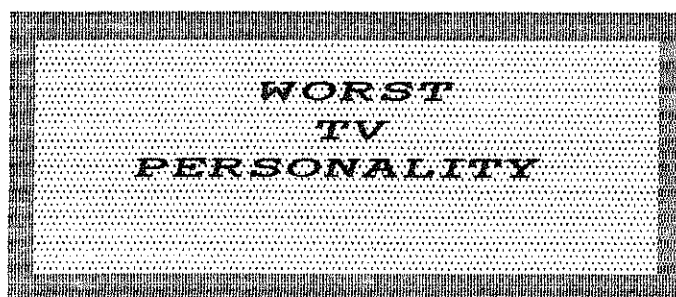
(WWF)

665 Points

2. THE MASTER BLASTERS, WCW, 457.
3. THE BLACK SCORPION, WCW, 292.
4. MAGNUM FORCE, WCW, 289.
5. EARTHQUAKE, WWF, 236.
6. TUGBOAT, WWF, 220.
7. CANDYMAN, WCW, 152.
8. THE BOWLERS, CNWA, 56.
9. TEXAS TORNADO, WWF, 48.
10. THE JUICER, WCW, 40.

It's hard to figure whether Tony Atlas has become Kunta Kinte or the new Wahoo McDaniel with that outfit and two different spellings of his name. We are reminded almost weekly that he lost the ICW heavyweight title to Vic Steamboat. But that's another show. MATWATCHers were not particularly emotional in their voting. They simply didn't like Atlas as Simba.

The Master Blasters appear to be a bad idea Dusty Rhodes should simply let fade. Says George Thompson of Toronto: "It's bad enough to try to do a Road Warriors clone but when you do a bad Road Warriors clone, it is a complete insult."



WINNER :

**Thunderbolt
Patterson**

(WCW)

517 Points

2. HERB ABRAMS, UWF, 312.
3. THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR, WCW, 243.
4. JUNKYARD DOG, WCW, 240.
5. THE MASTER BLASTERS, WCW, 232.
6. ANDRE THE GIANT, WWF, 208.
7. VERNE GAGNE, AWA, 200 1/2
8. ROBERT GIBSON, WCW, 100.
9. SCOTT "FLASH" NORTON, AWA/PORTLAND, 89.
10. ED WHALEN, CNWA, 88.

David Crockett is consigned to the hopeless cause of promoting WCW's west coast swing, MATWATCHers have decided The Ultimate Warrior isn't quite as bad a personality as he they thought last year (although those "Hoke Hokum" interviews were worth considering) and Tim Dix was a better manager than he was a commentator. Introducing this year's winner of The McLean Stevenson-David Crockett Futility Award: Thunderbolt Patterson. Thankfully, Teddy Long has all the talent Thunderbolt never did.

T'bolt is one of these things like Cream of Wheat: you have to cultivate a taste for him. And if you do, you find it's bad taste. Just a time or two, when he would tell Jim Ross, "If I could ONLY say what I want to say. I'm so full.....," I wish Ross had piped back, "Then say it and get it over with because we know what you're full of."

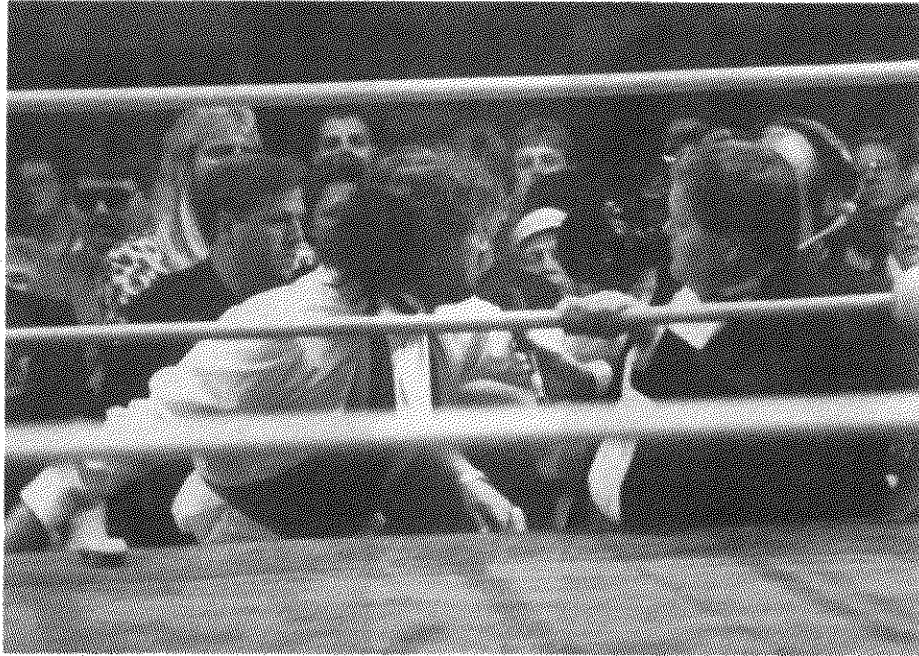
Herb's momentum carried over from his victory in the PLAY-BY-PLAY competition and leaves promise because since Thunderbolt is gone and the UWF has lasted through January, Abrams automatically qualifies for next year's voting and could win.

I don't know that I would have put JYD in the show position, simply because there were so many I saw worse. Some wrestling analysts still cannot figure why newsletter subscribers don't see the value of Ultimate Warrior as a personality but perhaps if he wasn't having to live in the shadow of Hulk Hogan, he would not come across as such a weak link. Jim Hellwig is simply a weak interview.

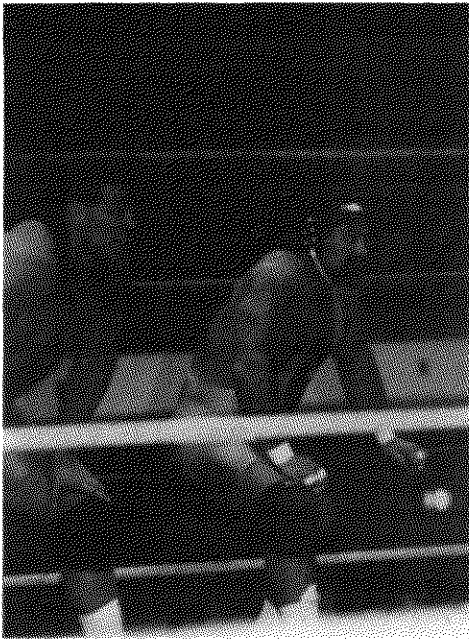
Here's an example of an early Master Blasters interview: "We are....the Master....Blasters. And we are....here...to....stay!" These are two guys who never should be close to a mike. As for Andre, he may be a bad personality but he still got a Post cereals endorsement this year.

And then there was 1989's winner: Old Verne. Is it possible that the old boy improved with age? I mean, has he gained so much stature that he is only seventh-worst in the land? Or is it simply the old cliché of "outta sight, outta mind?" If it's true that the AWA has a 26-week contract to continue on ESPN and all we're served are a diet of reruns, we'll retire Old Verne from the competition next year. After all, he may drop to 13th.

(OTHER VOTES: Percival Pringle III, USWA, 76; Greg Gagne, AWA, 65 1/2; Downtown Bruno, USWA, 44; Leon Spinks, USWA, 40; Jim Herd, WCW, 13; Vince McMahon, Jr., WWF, 8; Brother LUV, WWF, Rocky King, WCW, Gorilla Monsoon, WWF, and Missy Hyatt, WCW, 5 each; Vicious Vicki, USWA, Craig Johnson, USWA, J.C. Carson, SOUTHEASTERN, Tim Dix, SCW, and Ralph Strangis, AWA, 3 each; Ray Candy, GA. ALL-STAR, Jimmy Snuka, WWF, Tommy Jammer, AWA, Dusty Rhodes, WWF, Richard Marley, WCW, and Earthquake Tenta, WWF, 1 each.)



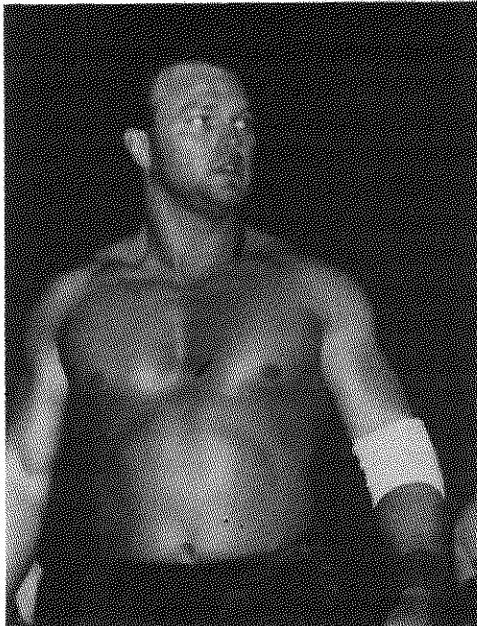
ROSS SCORES THE HAT TRICK
WCW Host BEST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER Third Straight Year



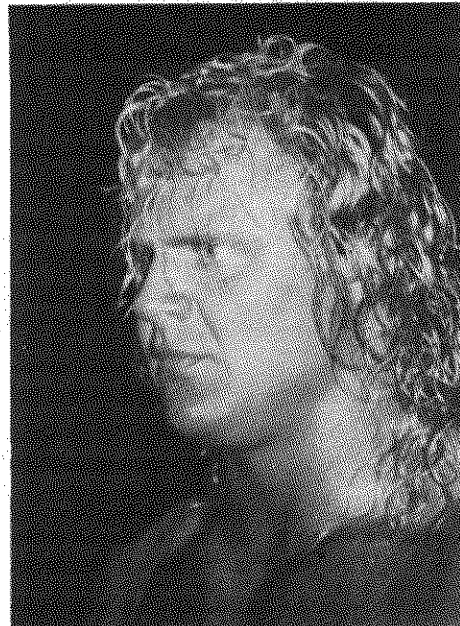
STEINER BROTHERS
No. 2 PPV Match vs. Nasties



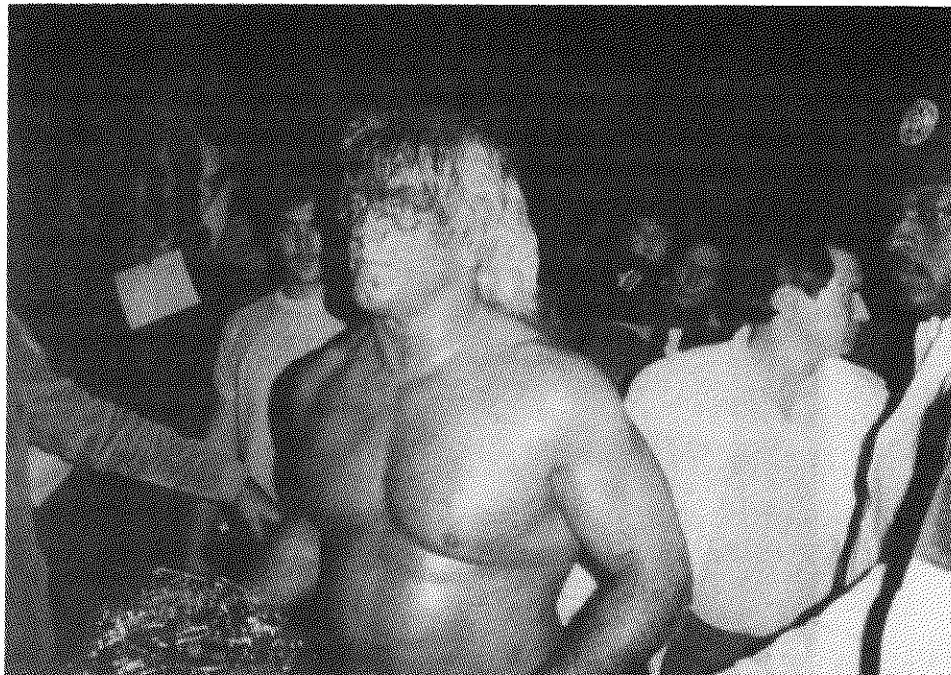
CHRIS CRUISE
Best Play-By-Play Runner-Up



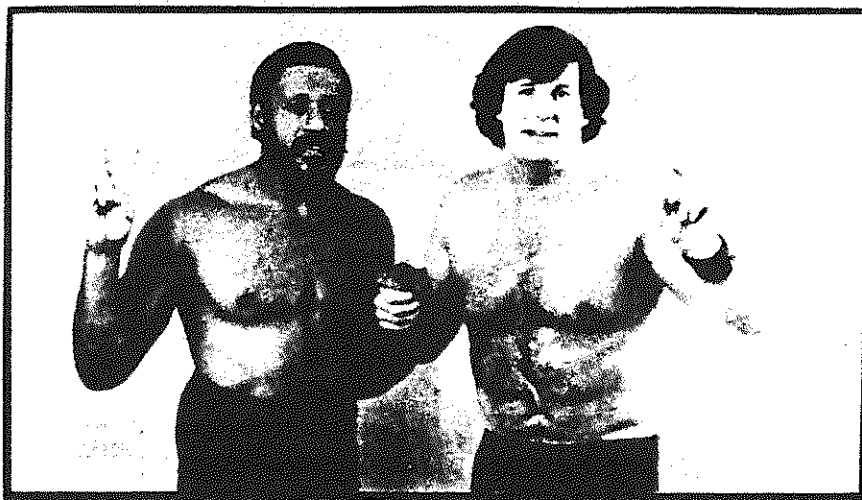
EDDIE GILBERT
No. 2 Best Single Performance



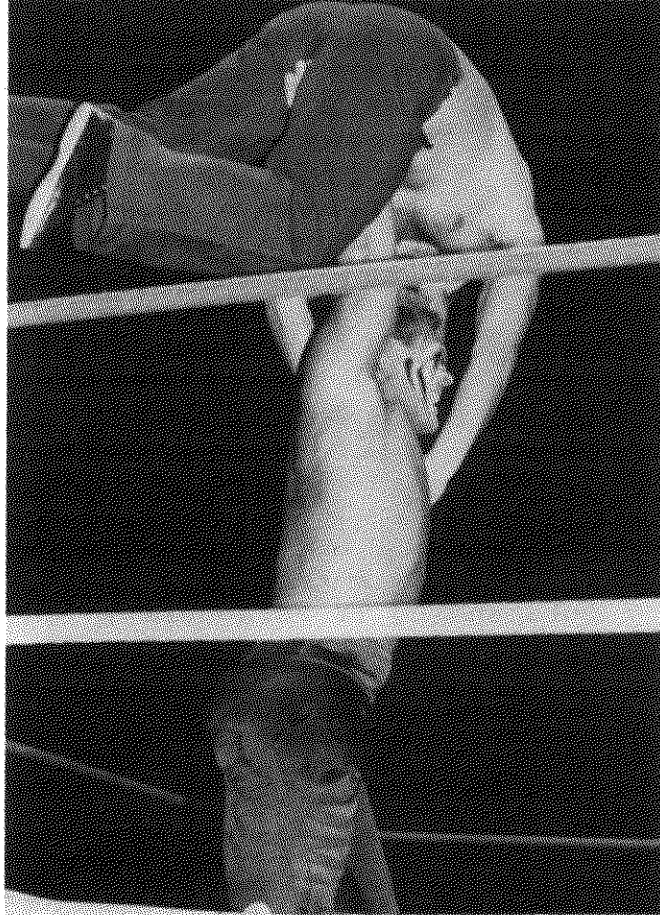
CURT HENNIG
Santana Match Among Tops



RIC FLAIR
Outstanding TV Personality



THUNDERBOLT PATTERSON
Worst TV Personality/Color Commentator with Jim Wilson



STING WINS NWA TITLE IN BALTIMORE

Sting's victory over Ric Flair in the finale of the GREAT AMERICAN BASH pay-per-view show is heralded as one of the MATWATCH TOP 15 TV NEWS STORIES for 1990. Inside the next 19 pages are highlights of the outstanding events related to television wrestling during the year past. As in any year, television played the most important role in the ups and downs of major promotions in the U.S. and Canada.

THE LAST MATCH

By Dr. Gerald W. Morton

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Over the past three years, I've delighted in making the friendship of the author of this piece. Dr. Morton is a professor at Auburn University at Montgomery in Alabama and is co-author of the book, *WRESTLING TO RASSLIN'*, which details an academic view of the evolution of pro wrestling prior to the year 1983. Dr. Morton has regained the rights to his previously published short story, *THE LAST MATCH*, and shares it for the *MAT-WATCH 1990 ANNUAL*. It could have happened anywhere in America.)

The announcer's voice sparkled with excitement as it told of the upcoming sports extravaganza to be held in the Clarenceville National Guard Armory. "...and in the main event, Johnny Martin and Ivan Andranov will meet in a no disqualification, loser leave town match."

Grandma and I squirmed with excitement, knowing that nothing would keep us from our ringside seats for this one. For the past several weeks, we'd spent every Wednesday night at the Armory and every Saturday afternoon in front of the television watching the feud between Martin and Andranov work its way to this exciting match.

It had all started when Andranov had interfered in a match between the Canadian Strangler and Martin, causing Martin to lose his Tennessee Heavyweight Championship, next to the world's heavyweight championship the most important belt in all wrestling, the announcer said, because all the best wrestlers were in Tennessee.

After losing his championship, Martin decided that revenge was more important than regaining his belt, so he set out to whip Andranov, which he

did in a grudge match on television, except after the match, Andranov, the Strangler, and several other wrestlers had held Martin and cut his hair, right in the middle of the ring and on television, too. A couple of weeks later, Martin caught Andranov in the dressing room, tarred and feathered him, and dragged him out in front of the television cameras. It was great, but you just knew that Johnny wouldn't be able to get away with it. Sure enough, Andranov won the next match they had, and unfortunately the loser had to put on a dress. I got pretty upset, but Grandma said I shouldn't.

"A man's gotta stand behind his word, even if that Russian rat did pull something from his trunks to hit Johnny with!"

The next week was even better because, again on television, Johnny kissed Andranov's wife Gurnia who went to all the matches and sat in his corner. She was really ugly, but wrestlers are used to pain, so I figured that Johnny didn't mind too much. After that, Andranov made her wear the black veil of shame because she'd been disgraced. He was most

likely just jealous because she hadn't seemed to mind the kiss, probably because Andranov's real ugly, too, and she has to kiss him most of the time. She's not a wrestler and used to pain and probably doesn't even like to even if he is her husband. But when he made her wear that veil, Grandma finally got upset, especially when one day Johnny pulled it off and Gurnia's eyes were blackened.

"That Russian needs a good horse whippin' for treatin' that woman that way, 'ceptin' she deserves it for marrin' him," Grandma cried with a passion that made it clear she'd be glad to do the whipping if Johnny didn't. But we knew he would so it didn't come to that.

And now they were going to settle it once and for all, and Andranov would have to leave town; at least I hoped he would. Not that I had any doubt that Johnny could whip him, but with Andranov you just never knew what would happen. He was sneaky and won a lot of matches.

All day at school on Wednesday the time passed real slow as all I could think about was going to wrestling that night. At lunch I got into a fight with Freddy Johnson who said that wrestling was fake and that they knew ahead of time who was going to win. At least the principal let us off easy with three licks and a warning instead of calling our folks. Mom and Dad didn't care much for going to wrestling anyway and mainly went just to take Grandma, but they sure would have left me at home as punishment if they knew I'd been fighting. I figured three licks was a low price to pay for considering what was at stake.

That night when we finally arrived, the parking lot at the Armory was full and hard to get into because people had parked their cars in such directions that they looked

like the bumper cars at the fair before the ride starts. It would start when they were leaving and trying to get to Shoney's ahead of the crowd. But for now everyone was much more concerned with getting good seats than whether they got a few scrapes or dents on their cars.

When she saw all the cars, Grandma checked her purse for the tickets she'd picked up earlier in the week. There they were, front row seats where we'd be able to see all the action. She'd also brought her cane along, saying that her rheumatism was bothering her, but Dad made her leave it in the car. He knew that she wasn't beyond using it if the situation got desperate and it looked like Johnny might lose the match and have to leave town.

The atmosphere inside the Armory was kind of like that at a church pot luck dinner. All manner of people were milling about, ignoring their children who were running around drop kicking each other and trying out new wrestling holds they'd seen on television, twisting each other's arms and legs in every direction other than the way they were supposed to go. Mama looked at me as if to say "you stay with us."

Most of the men and women were from the surrounding farms and came dressed in work pants and windbreakers or cotton dresses and ragged sweaters. The mayor and other local officials stuck out in their fine dress as they wore pastel colored leisure suits and flowered shirts that bulged at the waist like a five dollar bouquet. The older boys with dates had their hair styled and wore bright slacks and shirts with white loafers and belts. No doubt about it, it was a big night and the whole town was out in their Sunday dress.

Since I was almost twelve, I was also beginning to notice the girls who wore dresses made out of what

looked something like colored cheese cloth and that was so thin their bras showed through. Especially the ones whose bras were colored different than the dresses. They had on lots of makeup so that their eyes looked a lot like Gurnia's had when Johnny had pulled off the black veil of shame.

These girls always sat in Johnny's corner and offered their clothes to him after matches so that he could wipe away any blood and sweat. It seemed quite a gesture to me, but I wasn't sure that a handkerchief wouldn't have been more practical considering what those dresses must have cost; still you had to appreciate the generosity of these ladies.

We barely got to our seats in time for me to look around before the matches started. On one side was an old man with a bandage wrapped around his head and blood crusted behind one ear. He was a real wrestling fan to be there in that condition. On the other side was a man who kept bending over to drink from a brown bag without being observed by the ushers and a five or six year old little girl squirming around, anxious for things to start right away, which they did.

The early matches went by pretty fast as no one cared much who won. Between a little girl yelling obscenities and the man with the bandaged head adding his remarks, however, we all had a good time.

At last the only match left was between Johnny and Andranov, and we were all ready: the girls with the cheese cloth dresses, the farm folks, the little girl with the dirty mouth, the old man with the bandaged head, Grandma and me. Johnny came out first, bounding into the ring, his muscular body well-oiled and his blond hair neatly trimmed and combed. Cheers filled the hall as he began his warmups, stretching and bending, occasionally flexing his muscles for the girls who sat in his corner so

that his body rippled and excited them with every twitch. Grandma beamed, and I knew that if she'd been younger she would have been over in Johnny's corner wearing a cheese cloth dress.

Before we even saw him, a chorus of boos and a volley of flying paper wads and cups of ice sailing toward the villain's dressing room announced Andranov's arrival. He slowly preceded his wife Gurnia as they worked their way down the aisle between the rows of folding chairs. Several of the older boys threatened to take him on but then backed off when Andranov sneered and encouraged their efforts and called them American cowards when they refused to carry out their threats.

"Andranov's a Russian queer," the little girl shouted to a loud round of approval from everyone who heard her. Her father now sat staring into the brown bag he no longer bothered to hide from the ushers. "Atta girl," he said without looking up.

Even the old man with the bandaged head was more serious than he had been earlier. "Johnny'd better watch out tonight," he said to the people around him. Grandma nodded her agreement, her face no longer beaming but rather set with worry and determination. I could tell by the look that she was thinking about her cane back in the car.

When they finally reached the ring, Gurnia jumped up and stretched the ropes apart so that Andranov could easily climb in. A roar of cheers went up as Johnny blew her kisses, and, although it was hard to tell behind the black veil of shame, she seemed to smile in response. Andranov responded by barking at her and ordering her to get out of the ring and into her chair in the corner. Then stepping over to the ring announcer, he grabbed the microphone away.

"Say goodbye to your hero," Andranov shouted as he gestured to the audience, his features set in a confident smirk. "For tonight, I, Professor Ivan Lastamovich Andranov, am going to annihilate my opponent." Johnny waved him off, but Andranov continued amidst a symphony of boos, hisses and obscenities about his mother.

"You see before you the greatest instrument of human destruction in all the world," he shouted in response to the catcalls, "and I'm going to avenge the insults my wife has suffered by ending Johnny Martin's wrestling career, right here in front of you tonight."

Suddenly, Johnny who had been sitting back and listening and smiling, leaped across the ring and grabbed Andranov, pounding him into the mat while the announcer slid out of the ring and the referee called for the bell. Johnny's attack came so suddenly that it appeared the match might end before really getting started as he dropkicked, bodyslammed shoulder broke, and pile drove Andranov in a series of good moves. The chorus again broke out as the building filled with approving cheers.

The little girl shouted another obscenity while her father continued encouraging her, his head now permanently planted between his legs, and the man with the bandaged head and blood crusted ear roared his approval as well.

The excited reaction continued as Andranov rolled through the ropes and into the protective arms of Gurnia, but Johnny followed immediately after him as it was a no disqualification match which meant that anything goes. Suddenly, Andranov grabbed Gurnia and hurled her into Johnny, leaving them both lying knocked out on the floor and sending the black veil of shame flying into the audience where

several of the fans scrambled for it.

Andranov took full advantage of the situation and began pounding Johnny's face until blood dripped from a head wound, coloring Johnny's face and Andranov's fist. Gurnia crawled away searching for her black veil of shame. Paper wads, bottles, popcorn and boos came flying from the crowd as Johnny received the beating he had been promised only moments before.

No one even noticed that the little girl's father had looked up from his brown bag until he suddenly grabbed Andranov, spun him around and with one punch, left him lying unconscious on the floor.

A confused silence filled the Armory as we all sat quiet, especially Johnny and Gurnia, both of whom had completely recovered and stood staring as the police escorted the man out and the referee worked on Andranov with smelling salts.

It was all over in less than five minutes. An old drunk had ended with one punch the most eagerly awaited match to be held in Clarenceville in years. No one spoke, not even the old man with the bandage around his head. In the silence we all headed toward the door to go to Shoney's until Grandma smiled and spoke up, "Just think, the next time, it will have to be a cage match if they're goin' to settle this thing once and for all."

(Dr. Morton has written for a number of academic journals and literary magazines. He has also been frequently interviewed on television and radio news programs prior to major wrestling cards of the 1980s.

He can be reached at Auburn University-Montgomery, Montgomery AL 36193-0401.)

Best and the Rest of '90

**MATWATCH TOP 15 NEWS
STORIES OF THE YEAR**

Dramatic breakthroughs, upward turns, innovations are what one looks for in selecting the year's top news stories in any field. Unfortunately, during the year 1990, many of the top television news stories in wrestling served as catalysts for **WHAT WENT WRONG**. **MATWATCH** selections for the top 15 news stories of the year center strictly around events affected by the television end of the business, not simply title changes, personnel movements or out-of-ring incidents.

The top news stories cover events, personalities and television occurrences for the period December 1, 1989-November 30, 1990. All selections cover strictly television-related news events in the United States and Canada.

**ULTIMATE WARRIOR DEFEATS
HULK HOGAN FOR WWF BELT
AT WRESTLEMANIA VI**

111111

NUMBER

111111

It was, simply stated, the most dramatic 25 minutes in pro wrestling during 1990. Only the most traditional NWA hardcore could not have been swept up by the intensity and crescendo of the match, led by a screaming 64,000 in the Toronto Skydome, and what may have been the ring performance of Hulk Hogan's career. The late March main event

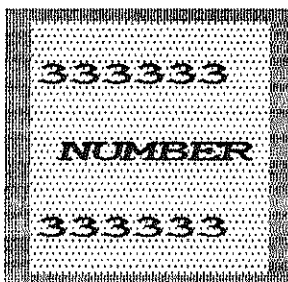
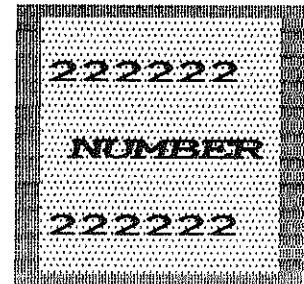
marked a literal passing of the torch as standardbearer of the WWF, though the initial months of Jim Hellwig's reign did not prove an instant boom for the Warrior character. For purely entertainment purposes, the Hogan-Warrior battle was outstanding television.

The **WRESTLEMANIA** pay-per-view buy-rate was the lowest percentage in pay-cable history (3.9%), which was a story in itself, considering the buildup for the confrontation of babyfaces, but what set this single match apart were two things: its booking, with 14 false finishes and a longer contest than either performer had ever presented on national television, which lifted an average match, wrestling-wise, to one of the most memorable in history; and the four-minute post-match period in which a teary-eyed Hogan went for the WWF world belt, returned to the ring and presented the strap to the Warrior before an emotional embrace between the two. Jesse Ventura wrapped the package in a catharsis with the line, "Who knows? Hulkamania just may live forever."

VINCE McMAHON, WWF BATTLE VIEWER'S CHOICE IN PAY- PER-VIEW REVENUE DISPUTE

In probably the major business dispute of 1990, which threatened the entire structure of the WWF's relationship with pay-cable television, pay distributor Viewer's Choice, which held the key to cable operators with more than million homes, pulled the plug on Titan Sports pay cards in early December 1989. Titan had attempted to increase its own percentage of PPV revenues for 1990 shows and the Viewer's Choice consortium balked.

During its on-air syndicated and USA Network shows and for nearly 45 minutes of a taped pay show, NO HOLDS BARRED: THE MATCH/THE MOVIE, Titan announcers lambasted VC and openly solicited a viewer telephone and mail campaign to the cable systems which own the pay service. Viewer's Choice officials responded decisively in trade journals BROADCASTING and ELECTRONIC MEDIA. The week before the January ROYAL RUMBLE, Titan backed down on its hard-line stance on an increase and signed a seven-year deal with VC for its future pay shows. However, it was too late to save the RUMBLE from an estimated 1.9% buy-rate, one of the two lowest in WWF history.



STING WINS NWA WORLD TITLE IN FINALE OF BALTIMORE'S "GREAT AMERICAN BASH"

After a rise to national stardom of nearly three years and a brief stutter-step, thanks to a massive knee injury in February, Steve (Sting) Borden defeated Ric Flair to capture the NWA world heavyweight championship in the main event of the third pay-per-view GREAT AMERICAN BASH.

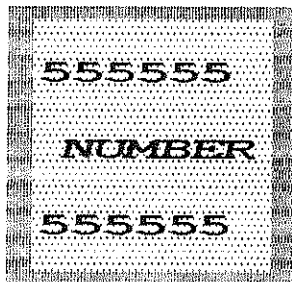
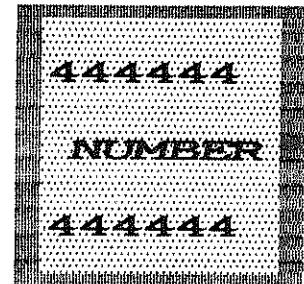
Subtitled NEW REVOLUTION, the Sting-Flair confrontation drew a 1.6% buy-rate among pay-cable subscribers and was the weakest of four nationally-televvised matches between the two in the last two years. Flair, who reverted to a heel in February after less than a year in an unsuccessful run as a babyface, appeared off his standard timing and unenthusiastic in dropping the belt to the NWA's first true "character" champion (Dusty Rhodes aside). Sting, in his first match since the injury, was tentative in spots and held back on some of his more risky flying moves until a Stinger splash near the end.

The show ended with a massive pyrotechnic display to celebrate Sting's victory, which was about the most spectacular element of his six-month run as world champion. The BASH show, wrestling-wise, was more noteworthy for its Southern Boys-Midnight Express match, voted by MATWATCHers as the Outstanding Pay-Per-View Match of 1990.

**CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS
XII SETS AUDIENCE RECORD
FOR TWO MAIN EVENTS**

After a predominantly lackluster show, audience interest was strong enough in the first live basic cable television match between Ric Flair and Lex Luger and in a finale between NWA world champion Sting and a mystery figure, The Black Scorpion to set a new viewership record for cable television.

Both the Flair-Luger and Sting-Scorpion events were seen in 3.8 million homes, which topped the Flair-Terry Funk match of November 1988 and the January 1988 WWF ROYAL RUMBLE. Ole Anderson's much-maligned CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS XII registered a 5.0 rating and was the third most-watched TBS wrestling special ever. The September special, which saw Flair lose by disqualification to Luger when Stan Hansen ran in and a Sting win over the Scorpion (Al Perez) before a second Scorpion (Dave Sheldon) appeared at ringside and a closing angle which saw Sid Vicious attack Sting, was the high spot in audience levels during the seven-month Anderson bookership of WCW.



**FOUR EPISODES OF WEEKLY
WCW, WWF CABLE SERIES
BREAK 4.0 RATING LEVEL**

In a year which saw a slow erosion of cable TV ratings, two episodes of the formerly-named NWA MAIN EVENT, one of WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING and an August edition of USA Network's PRIME TIME WRESTLING either matched or topped a 4.0 rating, a virtual benchmark for cable series in the last half-decade.

NWA MAIN EVENT registered a 4.4 rating on one of the nation's coldest weekends in January for a Ric Flair/Arn Anderson vs. Rock & Roll Express topline to become the most-watched episode of a weekly cable wrestling series in history. The segment was seen in nearly 2.4 million homes with the tag team finale posting a 4.6 rating for its 20 minutes, the most-watched single match of a weekly cable series ever. Flair resigned as WCW booker two days later. One week previously, NME averaged a 4.1 rating to again top the magic number.

The same weekend, WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, which advanced several angles leading up to the February CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS special, rolled to a 4.0 rating, its highest figure in more than three years and its top audience ever in 2.18 million homes.

An August edition of WWF PRIME TIME WRESTLING on USA Cable checked in with a 4.1 rating for its most-watched outing ever in 2.21 million homes.

In its early years the WCW Saturday show scored ratings as high as 6.8 and PRIME TIME once posted a 4.8 in 1985 but cable homes were then fewer.

But Funk, pressured from his roles as executive producer of syndication and WCW booking committee member, became frustrated when many of his ideas were not adapted. Cruise had been told by insiders the return of Tony Schiavone to WCW would cost him his WORLD WIDE WRESTLING host slot. Further, Cruise had been shifted to an alternating road ring announcer post and was subjected to comments in front of other wrestlers like this one from Kevin Sullivan: "We're gonna do this tonight. Chris, be sure and tell Meltzer about this one."

WCW personnel had to fly to Jackson MS on their way to Greenwood MS for a syndication taping. Funk said later on New York's PRO WRESTLING SPOTLIGHT, "I got to Jackson and I just realized it was time to go home. So I changed my flight and went home to Texas."

Cruise went on to Greenwood but learned hours before the show that Sullivan would be his co-host. Cruise refused to go on. "I was tired. I had been on the road more than two weeks and I was battling the flu. When they told me Kevin was going on with me, all I could think of was the prospect of him embarrassing me on the air," Cruise told MATWATCH.

Cruise was dismissed by WCW executive vice president Jim Herd two days later.

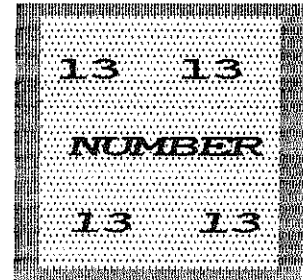
On the same FWS show, the two related some of their story. Funk said he had no regrets on leaving. "Why would I want to go up and down the road all over this great country with people like Oily Anderson?" said Funk. "To be honest with you, the way things are going in that organization (WCW), I don't want to be in the same office, I don't want to be in the same city, I don't want to even be in the same state with those people."

Despite editorials by MATWATCH and other publications asking for Funk to be given another chance and persistent rumors that Cruise would be brought back, neither reappeared with WCW, though Funk finished the year as the USWA world champion and Cruise returned for a short stint as play-by-play announcer for the cable version of LPWA.



CHRIS CRUISE

**"FAMILY FEUD:" WCW
FINALLY MAKES CELEBRITY
BREAKTHROUGH ON CBS**



Since Turner Broadcasting bought controlling interest in Jim Crockett Promotions in 1988, a major criticism has been its failure to market its wrestling stars as cross-over celebrities. A syndicated comedy series, **LEARNING THE ROPES**, during the 1988-89 season with Lyle Alzado and various NWA stars, including Ric Flair and the Road Warriors in guest roles, failed to draw significant numbers.

But May 1990 saw WCW make its first significant breakthrough as a five-man team of Sting, Road Warrior Animal, Rick and Scott Steiner and Lex Luger took on Jackie Stallone and four former GLOW competitors for a week on the CBS daytime version of **FAMILY FEUD**.

The biggest difficulty for host Ray Combs was in the dual monickers for WCW, still holding to its National Wrestling Alliance heritage. Announcer Gene Wood introduced them as "the stars of World Championship Wrestling, representing the National Wrestling Alliance." Combs wasn't so accurate, regularly referring to the stars of the "National Wrestling Association," or once, the "National Wrestling Federation."

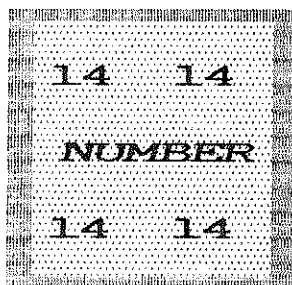
Ratings for the CBS **FEUD** editions increased by 0.7 rating points for the week and a later fall rematch upped ratings an average of two points per market in overnight syndicated averages.

WCW, playing for the Starlight Foundation, won four of the five days vs. GLOW, and was invited back in September to appear on the nighttime syndicated version of **FEUD**. Jim Ross, Brad Armstrong, Brian Pillman and Tom Zenk joined Sting for the second appearance. The Turner stars played **FEUD** again on the daytime edition in January 1991 with Dutch Mantel, Master Blaster Steel, Sid Vicious, Tony Schiavone and Kevin Sullivan appearing.



SEE YOU HERE ON THE "FEUD"

(L-R) Scott Steiner, Rick Steiner, Lex Luger



JERRY LAWLER REGAINS USWA TITLE IN FIVE-WEEK SUPERCARD SPECIAL

Aside from its ill-fated association with Verne Gagne in the December 1988 pay-per-view SUPER CLASH III special, the Dallas-based former WORLD CLASS organization had never launched a nationally-distributed supercard effort.

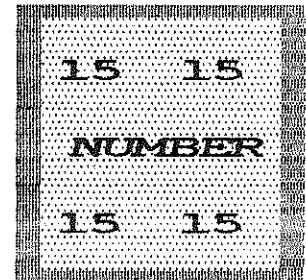
But the departure of Snowman (Eddie Crawford) as USWA "world" champion in the summer of 1990 opened an avenue. New Memphis-based booker Eddie Gilbert organized a 20-man tournament spectacular to decide a new champion called, simply, SUPERCARD.

In addition to the Memphis and Dallas regulars, Gilbert imported Mark Callous, Steve Keirn, Austin Idol, Dick Murdoch, Dick Slater and Terry Funk

to compete. While not a pay-cable event, the five-hour, 15 minute live show October 6 was edited into five hour-long specials, ending late in the November rating sweeps on the USWA CHALLENGE syndicated series with Jerry Lawler regaining the title in a tournament finale against Austin Idol.

For the first time, WMC-TV USWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING host Dave Brown was used at the mike on the syndicated series, as he teamed with USWA announcer Craig Johnson and analyst Joe Pedicino for the first two editions.

END OF A TEXAS TRADITION: KTVT CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTS



At one point during the mid-1980s, KTVT CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTS, the two-hour wrestling show which featured the Von Erich family and friends at the height of WORLD CLASS popularity, was one of the most-watched programs of any kind in the Dallas market. Ratings in the 20 range and shares well past 50 had advertisers clamoring for time inside the top-ranked independent's Saturday ring showcase.

But the evolution of the wrestling industry during the decade of the 1980s deteriorated the impact of the Texas promotion. A brief stint with Michael Hayes as booker in 1988 appeared to revive the series' popularity, though not to the heights as when Kerry Von Erich upset Ric Flair in Texas Stadium to win the NWA world championship.

The further encroachment of regular WWF SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT specials on NBC eroded the CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTS ratings to as low as 2.8 when the Titan troops were opposite. If Kerry's popularity with Sportatorium fans was the glue which held the group together, the promotion never recovered from his 18-month hiatus in the late '80s while recovering from a motorcycle accident. Twice, talks developed between NWA officials and, first, Fritz Von Erich, and later, Jerry Jarrett to take over the two-hour slot on the Southwest superstation.

But with numbers at an all-time low, KTVT entertained a bid from Titan Sports in the summer of 1990 to take over half the slot with WWF SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING, and canceled CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTS. KTVT has reverted to an extended movie and reruns of CHEERS in the other half. USWA WRESTLING in Dallas switched to an alternate independent, ending a Saturday night two-hour tradition.

Kevin Von Erich, who entered into a legal battle with former USWA partner Jarrett in the fall of 1990, left the group and attempted to revive the World Class promotion with many of the traditional Texas stars. But Von Erich never could afford television time for his venture and other than a few scattered commercials inside other wrestling shows in the market, during which Kevin never mentioned time or date of his cards, the World Class effort, in conjunction with Gary Hart, was doomed. Accompanied by a page one story in the DALLAS TIMES-HERALD, the Von Erich era of Texas wrestling, long buoyed by the KTVT show, was dead in December.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT TV WRESTLING STORIES OF 1990

AWA ENDS FIRST-RUN PRODUCTION

In 1985, Verne Gagne engineered a breakthrough in counterprogramming Vince McMahon's spreading efforts into national television. AWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, which---at first---occasionally featured stars from the NWA and other promotions, gained a 90-minute prime time slot as part of a Tuesday evening ESPN lineup of SLAMS AND JAMS (Roller Derby in the second half).

Ratings went through the roof for the all-sports network and as late as early 1988, AWA WRESTLING was the top-rated weekly series on ESPN (outside of college football telecasts and occasional Big East basketball).

But declining crowds and Gagne's failure to pay competitive dollar for top stars, many of whom he originally showcased, led to a deteriorating quality in the series.

A final-season effort to revamp the format with a TEAM CHALLENGE format never caught fire. Sgt. Slaughter left for one more run in the WWF and left champion Larry Zbyszko as the AWA's most significant star. By 1990, AWA WRESTLING had been relegated to a Monday afternoon slot when most of the heavily-male wrestling audience was on the job.

After five years of holding fort, AWA WRESTLING reverted to a series of reruns in September as Gagne had run out of money to continue first-run production.

ESPN was still broadcasting reruns in January 1991 amid reports Andrews Syndication had gained exclusive rights for wrestling in the Monday time period.

JOE PEDICINO LEAVES THE NWA

Accompanied by perhaps the most pointed MATWATCH column of 1990, Joe Pedicino departed World Championship Wrestling, Inc., after a year of handling a JOE PEDICINO KNOWS... studio segment, a short stint as producer of syndication and handling color commentary on THE WRESTLING HOTLINE.

Pedicino, who joined the NWA after nearly four years of producing PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK, departed following a year of being criticized for suggesting drastic changes in the NWA presentation which went against the grain of Jim Crockett traditionalists and being chased as an alleged leak to wrestling newsletters.

The 40-year-old Pedicino restarted GEORGIA ALL-STAR WRESTLING and at year's end, had returned to the national color mike on USWA CHALLENGE.

As 1991 began, Pedicino was still in negotiation to launch Global Wrestling Federation, financed by a northeastern trust, headed by entrepreneur Olu Oleyami.

IWA, UWF ENTER SPORTSCHANNEL AMERICA LINEUP

Promoters Rob Russen and Herb Abrams jumped into the regional sports cable front by gaining slots on SPORTSCHANNEL AMERICA.

Russen, known as the master of "sold" wrestling shows to school, civic and charity groups, gained a summer run on SCA, featuring stars such as Kevin Von Erich, Terry Tay-

lor and Ivan Koloff on his International Wrestling Alliance series.

Former AWA announcer Lee Marshall was the original host of the program but was not as critically well-received as during his AWA run. Russen replaced Marshall with Minneapolis personality Mick Karch, who proved to be one of the top new mike finds of the year. Karch is host of a weekly SATURDAY NIGHT AT RINGSIDE wrestling marathon show in the Twin Cities.

After the 13-week IWA run, Russen shifted to Hagen Sports Network, a low-power station satellite linkup.

On SPORTSCHANNEL, the IWA was succeeded by Herb Abrams' UNIVERSAL WRESTLING FEDERATION FURY HOUR. The Abrams show, shot originally in California, premiered with a match between Steve Williams and rookie Davey (The Observer) Meltzer. Williams ended his win by stuffing a "newsletter" in "Meltzer's" mouth.

The Abrams show was characterized by quality graphics and insert interviews but bad announcing and overall production. The 1990 MATWATCH TV AWARDS winner as WORST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER wisely removed himself as host of the show after the first month.

The FURY HOUR headlined Williams, Paul Orndorff, booker B. Brian Blair and David Sammartino but the crowds appeared to show the most enthusiasm for Cactus Jack Manson. FURY shifted its taping in January 1991 to New York but was still emphasizing DQ finishes in its topline matches.

BATTLE OF EX-WIFE, WIFE IN USWA

Chris Adams showed a flair for Dallas-style angles during a spring and summer run with an innovative storyline.

Chris's former wife, Jeannie Clarke went on a weekly tear after his current spouse, Toni Adams which went to the extent of Jeannie providing pictures alleging Chris's involvement with other women.

Jeannie was usually accompanied by newcomer Steve Austin, said to be a one-time protege of Adams. The series of vignettes regularly ended with a catfight between the two women.

While criticized by MATWATCH and some other publications as another angle demeaning to women, suggesting a message that a woman has to be dependent on a man, USWA syndicated fans found the angle one of the more entertaining of the summer. One letter-writer told MATWATCH editor Steve Beverly: "I'm convinced you're the only one in America who didn't like it."

RACE REARS UGLY HEAD IN WCW

There are those who will justifiably argue for this story's inclusion in the Top 15 stories, possibly even in the Top 5. We chose to make it an also-ran because the storyline ended about as quickly as it began.

Ole Anderson's stint as WCW booker began with the 48-year-old veteran telling his troops in a Georgia dressing room: "Gentlemen, the calendar may say 1990 but I'm here to tell you, it's 1974 all over again and what worked then will work now."

The first week Anderson was at the helm of WCW, he indeed went back to one of his tried-and-true staples of his earlier Georgia years: the TV racial angle.

In an attempt to woo minority viewers to WCW shows and arenas, he cast perennial jobber Rocky King in the role of Buckwheat, taunting An-

derson and then NWA champion Ric Flair with a "big surprise."

Just as Flair was portrayed as a sex pervert by Dusty Rhodes, the champion was spouting semi-racial insults at King until The Junkyard Dog appeared in the ring to chase Flair. Anderson, who had made a career of insulting Thunderbolt Patterson with racial hatred in the 1970s and 1980s, literally was turning the clock back.

TV ratings increased to a 2.7 level where they stayed for most of Anderson's tenure but arena crowds continued to decline. Many wrestling publications decried Turner Broadcasting allowing the racial bits to air. On a New York radio program, former WCW announcer Chris Cruise put it this way: "Racial problems have always existed. But this is nothing to entertain people. It has no business in the '70s, the '80s or the '90s---or any time." Equally, a number of Southern fans, whom Anderson was trying to recapture, were insulted at the portrayal. Of course, the irony of it all is that both Anderson and Flair were Minnesotans.

Amidst the embarrassment the angle was aborted in a month.

CRAIG JOHNSON TAKES HELM OF USWA MIKE

For several years, Marc Lowrance had become a staple of Texas wrestling. Even though Lowrance was a perennial contender for WORST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER, he retained a loyal following in Texas and with a group of MATWATCHers in Tennessee.

But Lowrance opted to leave for full-time work in the ministry during the summer of 1990.

Enter Craig Johnson, the alias for Jon Horton, who had honed his skills

as play-by-play basketball announcer for George Washington University on the regional sports cable network HOME TEAM SPORTS and on soccer and other selected events for HTS.

Johnson, a long-time wrestling fan, brought an enthusiasm to the mike not seen since Jim Ross' ascension in the mid-1980s. His first half-year included the call on the USWA SUPERCARD specials and his first insult from new USWA champion Terry Funk ("I always thought Howard Cosell was a great man. A great announcer. Young man, you have a long way to go.")

HORSEMEN TURN, STING INJURY AT CLASH X

As detailed in the annual's analysis on WHAT WENT WRONG in 1990, the aborted babyface reign of Ric Flair came to a climax at the CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS X: TEXAS SHOOTOUT special on TBS in February.

Arguably the best-produced CLASH of the year, a Corpus Christi crowd saw Ole Anderson, Flair and Arn Anderson turn on top WCW contender Sting in the first half-hour of the show, in the wake of Sting's upset win over Flair at STARRCADE '89 in Atlanta.

Anderson gave Sting until the end of the broadcast to decide if he would relinquish his world title bid against Flair at the upcoming WRESTLE WAR '90.

Jim Ross and Jim Cornette played on the decision until the main event, a six-man match which saw usual heels Great Muta, Buzz Sawyer and Dragon Master cheered ("The Dragonmaster hasn't been cheered in 20 years," said Ross.). In the closing moments of the cage match, Sting attempted to climb the cage to get at the Horsemen. As he climbed a second time, his leg was yanked by WCW security

director Doug Dellinger and Steve Borden suffered a major tear of the patella tendon, which could have threatened his career. Flair chased after Sting as the show credits rolled in an attempt to play out the angle and had to be told Sting was legitimately injured.

The Sting injury delayed his world title bid until the GREAT AMERICAN BASH spectacular in Baltimore in July.

THANKSGIVING THUNDER: A COLOSSAL BOMB

If one were to tell you a TV wrestling special featured a standout Ric Flair-Butch Reed main event and a strong Buddy Landell-Brian Pillman early matchup, you'd believe a dynamite program had aired. In the case of CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS XIII: THANKSGIVING THUNDER, you'd be dead wrong.

After three years of live specials which more often than not are considered a cut above within the industry, CLASH XIII, the final production of WCW's Ole Anderson laid a bigger egg than the Gobbledy-Gooker of the WWF.

Buoyed by a Lex Luger-Motor City Madman (Mike Moore) matchup which saw Moore miss five simple forearms in a corner and what many people consider the worst match ever presented on a CLASH and perhaps on NWA national television in Sid Vicious vs. The Nightstalker, CLASH XIII died a bitter creative death.

Further handicapped by the failure of El Gigante to show for a six-man tag team opener (wrestler Dave Sierra had failed to pick up Jorge Gonzales at the Jacksonville International Airport in time for the show), the broadcast had virtually everything which could go wrong occur. An angle in which The Black Scorpion was to

continue tormenting Sting turned into WCW's version of The David Copperfield Show as the Scorpion became an illusionist, inciting a number of fans.

MATWATCH readers panned the CLASH more than any other previous TBS special, with only 14% of readers calling it a "good" show.

THANKSGIVING SPECIALS BURN OUT RING FANS

It was a case of good news and bad news. But 10 1/2 hours of prime time wrestling Thanksgiving week was the most on national television since the 1950s.

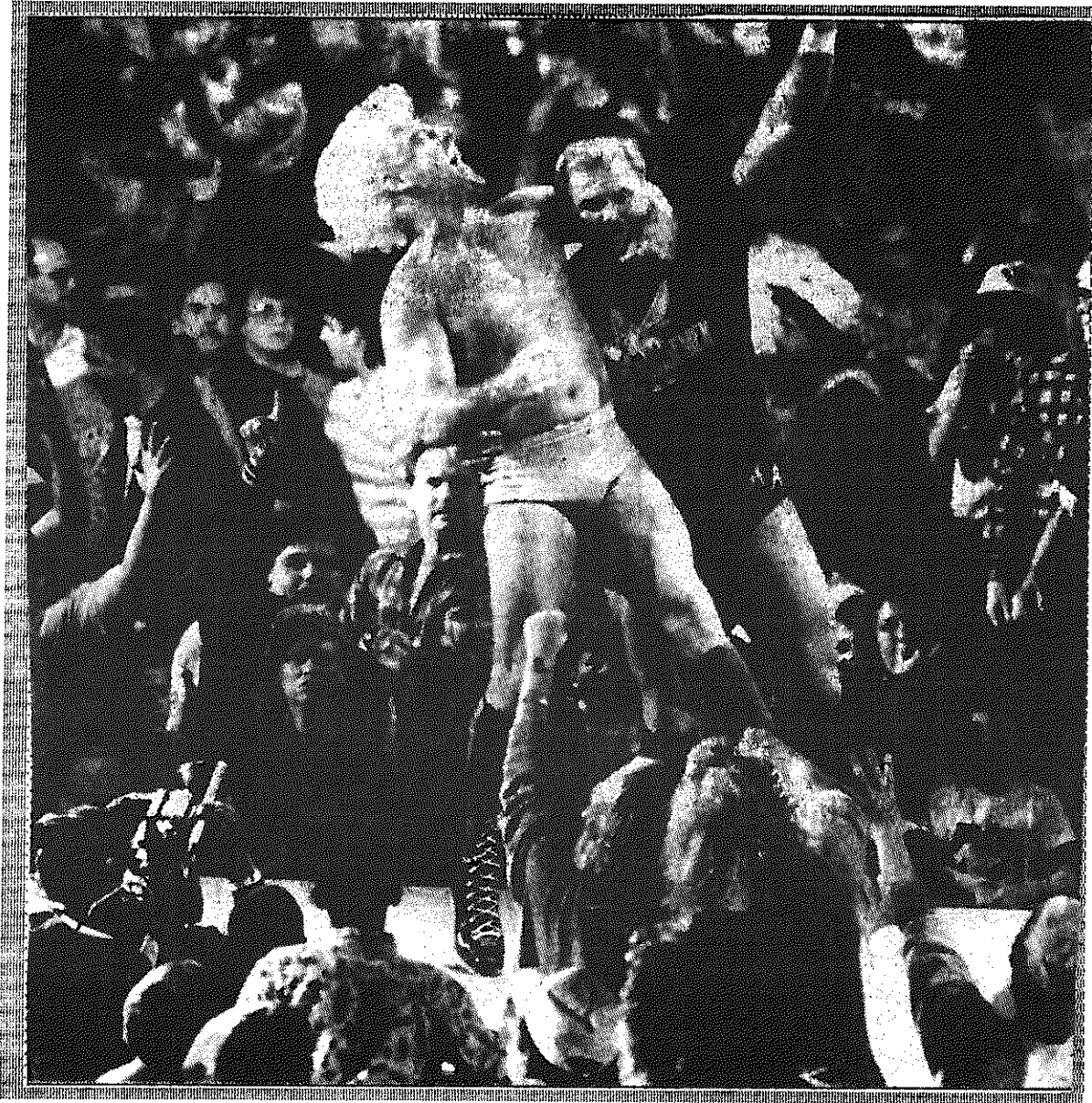
The good news came for the WWF in its SURVIVOR SERIES, which scored an estimated 2.8% buy-rate in pay-cable homes, same as in 1989 but a higher revenue draw with the increase in available pay homes.

The bad news came in almost every other front. The two SURVIVOR SERIES SHOWDOWN specials which launched the week on USA Cable were down almost 18% from the ratings of the 1989 SURVIVOR previews.

CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS XIII: THANKSGIVING THUNDER, a critical bomb and the first time TBS has offered a live special in the same week as the WWF SURVIVOR event, registered the third-lowest rating for the 13 CLASH events.

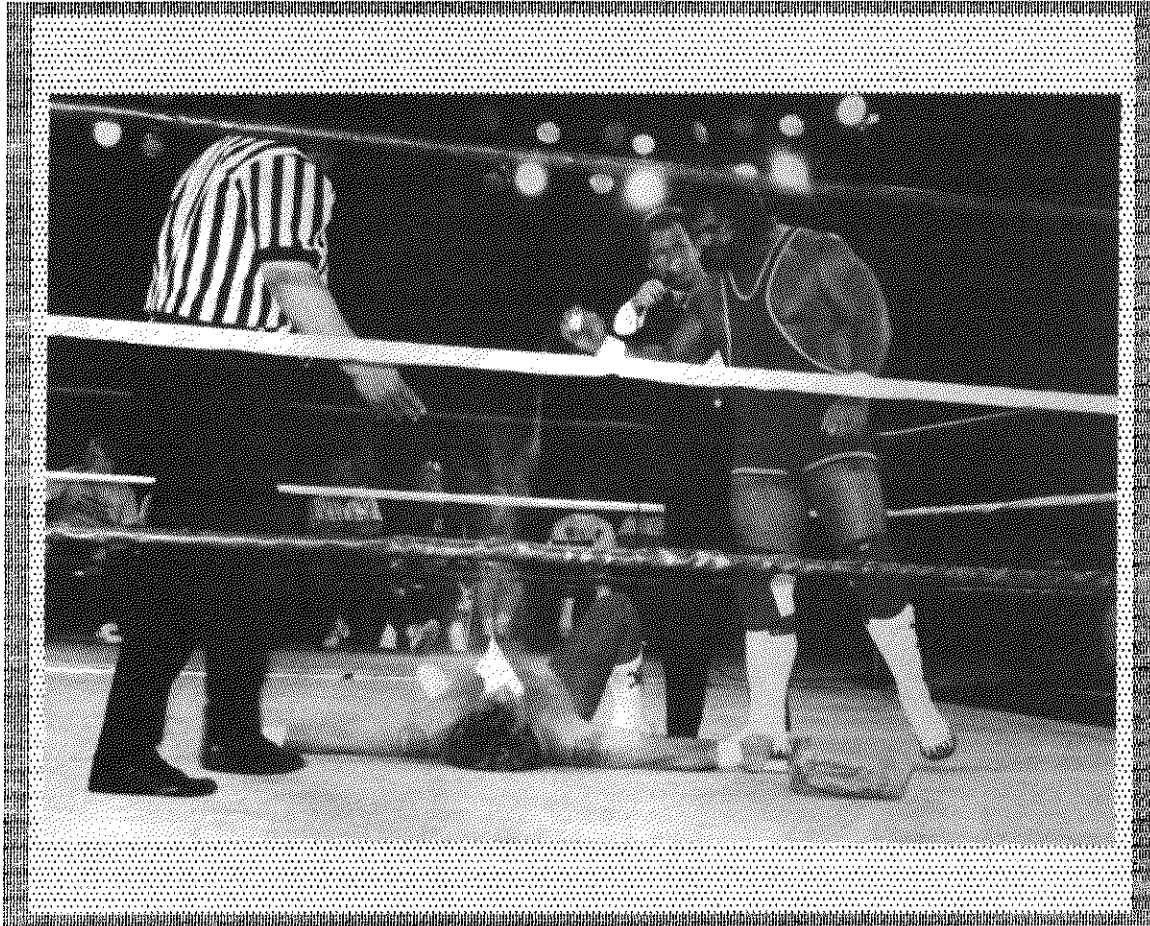
The drastic news was the drop in ratings for THE MAIN EVENT, the fourth prime-time special for the WWF on NBC. Hastily edited from what originally was to be a SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT, the night-after-Thanksgiving hour was the first NBC prime-time special not aired live.

TIME only posted an 8.0 rating and 15 per cent share of audience, almost half of the 15.2 rating for the first TIME in 1988.



CLASH XIII IN JACKSONVILLE

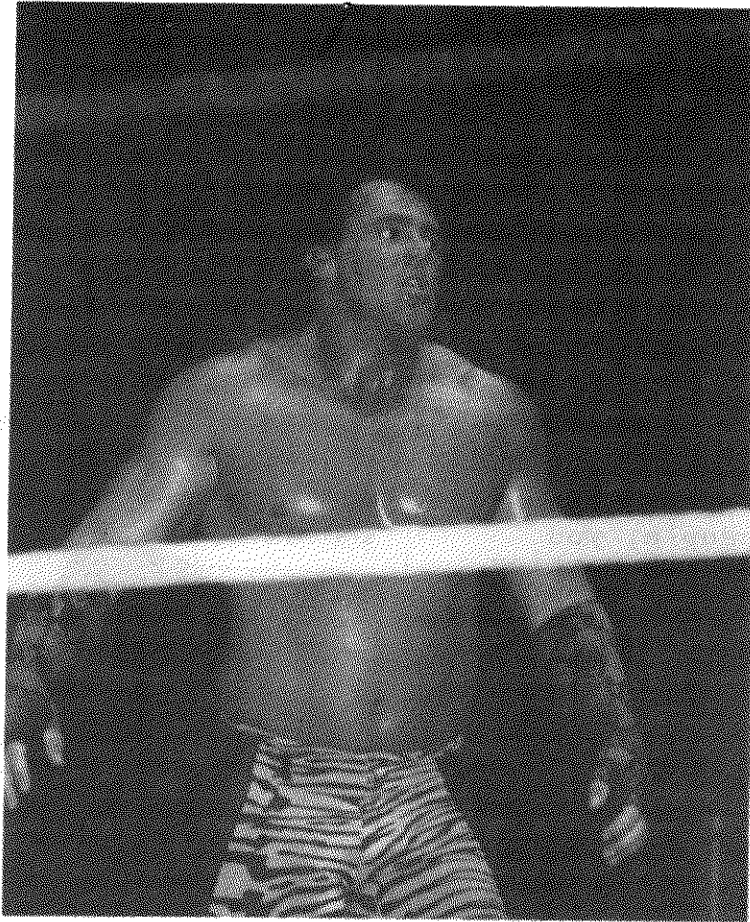
One of Five Prime Time Specials
During Thanksgiving Week 1990



"DAVEY MELTZER" GETS STUFFED

Steve Williams Observes UWF Jobber Eat Program

(Photo Courtesy of Ross Blair)



BRUTUS BEEFCAKE: FOURTH OF JULY DISASTER

In much the same fashion as happened in 1986 with NWA star Magnum T.A., a boating accident on the Fourth of July, which left Ed (Brutus Beefcake) Leslie partially disfigured stunned wrestling fans of all associations. The WWF star, who was on the way to the Intercontinental championship, suffered a crushed face and continues in rehabilitation.

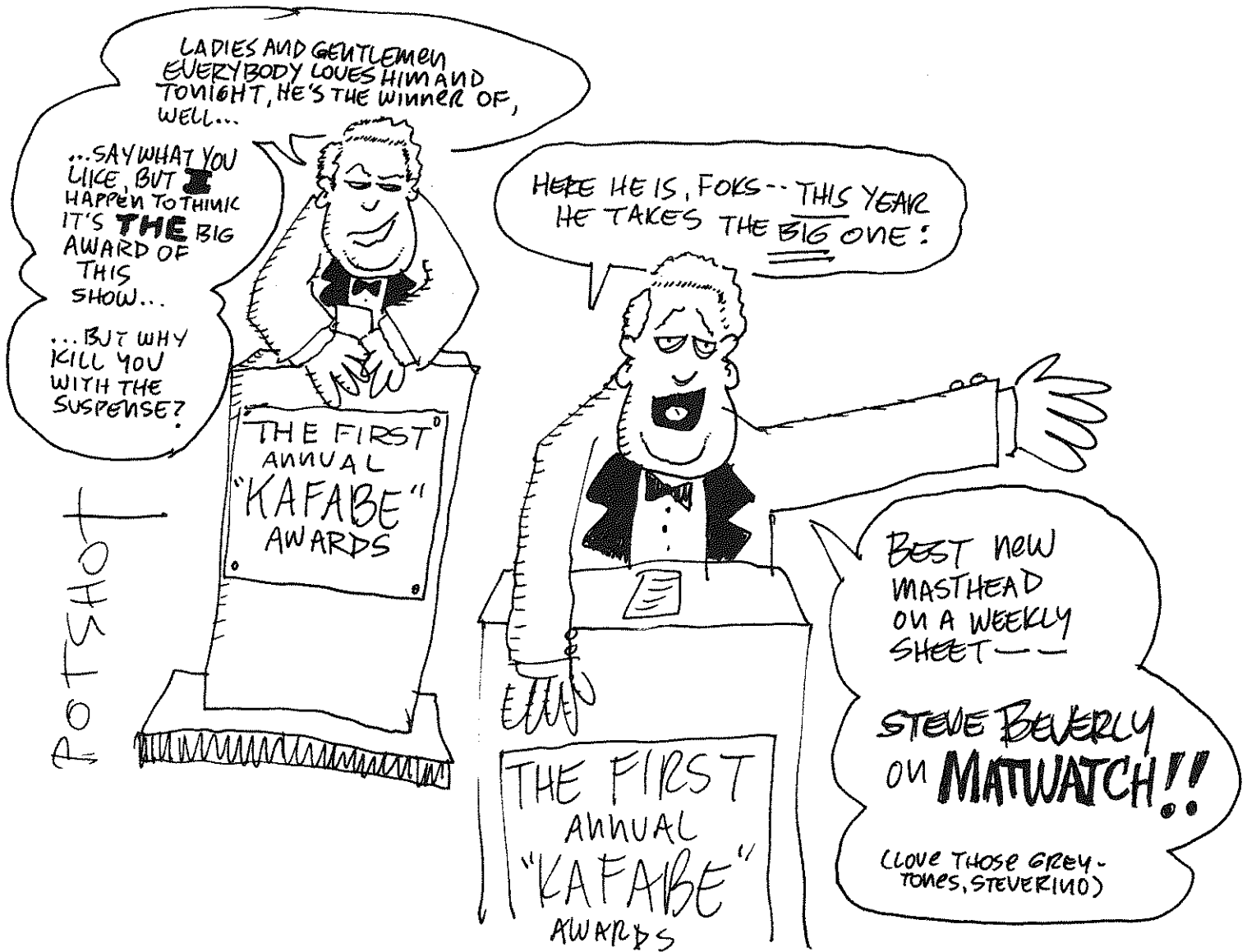
Television's role in reporting the Beefcake incident was ironic. WCW's Gordon Solie beat the WWF by one day in telling viewers of the accident, simply giving the facts and wishing Beefcake a speedy recovery. The next day, WWF fans were treated to SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING host Vince McMahon trying to relate the Leslie injury to his wrestling storyline. It doesn't all have to be business, Vince.

KUNKELTOONS

"Potshot" Bill Kunkel Reviews 1990

He's been turned loose again. Las Vegas' own Bill Kunkel, wrestling's best-known computer whiz and the Charles Schultzs of newsletters lampoons 1990 with a new round of POTSHOT'S KUNKELTOONS. If you cannot identify the people, you receive some lovely parting gifts and a home version of KUNKELTOONS.





Wrestling

Broadcasting

System

6:30 A.M.

(3) BLACKSTONES----Cartoon

Wilma comes home to discover Fred has come into \$25 million to buy into a new business called Kongistone. Voices....Wilma: Boni Blackstone. Fred: Joe Pedicino. Barney: Ronnie Garvin. Betty: Kelly Cornette. Mr. Slate: Jim Herd. Olu: Sidney Poitier. Dino: Jim Cornette.

(9) GALLOPING GOURMET----Graham Kerr
Graham's guest is Buddy Rose, who discusses his new book, "Success Through Dieting."

(38) SUPERMAN---Adventure

Clark announces he's changing his name to Jon Horton and quitting the Daily Planet to go to work for Home Team Sports. Clark: Craig Johnson. Lois Lane: Terri Power. Jimmy Olsen: Shane Douglas.

7:00 A.M.

(3) GOOD MORNING AMERICA

Paul Heyman substitutes for Charlie Gibson, who's helping his cousin Robert rehabilitate his knee. In the first five minutes, Paul calls Joan a "slut," interrupts Steve Crowley's report on credit cards to show how to avoid credit at the China Club and tells Joan he wants to bring on Jack Brickhouse as his co-host. (2 hrs.)

(9) TODAY

Teddy Long wins a coin flip to replace Bryant Gumbel as the host.

Teddy demonstrates what to do when a limousine malfunctions, takes you on a tour of a yacht and tells guest Lance Russell, "I'm gonna show everybody this list of womens who you have left behind with chil-ren." (2 hrs.)

(38) CBS THIS MORNING

Harry Smith and Paula Zahn welcome Rick Martel, who tells Paula he has more teeth than she does; Jeff Bowdren, who discusses his new book, "Better Booking by an Amateur;" and Mike Shaw, who discusses his new book, "I Never Wanted to Be a Trucker." (2 hrs.)

9:00 A.M.

(3) PEOPLE'S COURT

Kevin Von Erich in "The Case of the Splattered Sportatorium." Kevin sues Jerry Jarrett because World Class Wrestling can't draw 400 fans.

(9) DONAHUE----Discussion

Phil's guest is sports announcer Craig Johnson, who is interrupted by audience member Terry Funk, who tells Craig, "Howard Cosell was a great announcer. Why can't you be more like him?"

(38) DIVORCE COURT---Drama

Jeannie Clarke takes Chris Adams back to court to gain custody of Percy Pringle. Tomorrow, Jeff Jarrett testifies of a dramatic change in the case of Edward vs. Melissa Gilbert.

9:30 A.M.

(3) MORNING STRETCH----Exercise
Dusty Rhodes and Buddy Rose have a race to do three situps during the half-hour.

(38) LOVE CONNECTION----Game
Host Chuck Woolery welcomes Downtown Bruno and offers him a bar of the sponsor's Zest soap.

10:00 A.M.

(3) FAMILY FEUD----Game
Host Ray Combs asks Rick Steiner to "name a college dormitory." Rick answers, "Monty Hall."

(9) THE JUDGE----Drama
Paul Heyman tells the judge how Missy Hyatt keeps her job. Missy leaves the courtroom crying.

(38) GERALDO----Discussion
Guest is Dr. Mark Curtis, noted speech psychologist, who examines why Jim Hellwig says, "HOKE HOCUM," and attempts to interpret Leon Spinks wrestling interviews. (60 min.)

10:30 A.M.

(3) AMAZING DISCOVERIES
On this paid commercial broadcast, Buddy Rose attempts to sell viewers a year's supply of "Blowaway."

(9) LET'S MAKE A DEAL---Game
Host Monty Hall offers Steve Borden \$10,000 and the box on the display floor if he won't take the door where the Black Scorpion is hiding.

11:00 A.M.

(3) TO TELL THE TRUTH-----Game
The panel tries to determine who the

real Black Scorpion is but, for the first time, has to face a team of seven challengers.

(9) NAME THAT TUNE----Game
Originating from Corpus Christi TX, host Tom Kennedy asks contestant Jim Cornette to sing the lyrics to "Theme from World Championship Wrestling." To win \$100,000, Corny has to sing lyrics to "The Love Theme from World Championship Wrestling."

(38) GRAHAM KERR----Cooking
Graham demonstrates how to cook the Gobbledy-Gooker. (60 min.)

11:30 A.M.

(3) I DREAM OF JEANNIE----Comedy
Tony (Chris Adams) reveals his innermost thoughts.

(9) MATCH GAME
Host Ross Shafer asks the panel to answer, "Dino was so bravo, when he fell out of the ring, he bit his (blank)."

12:00 NOON

(3) YOUNG & THE RESTLESS
Kelly (Kelly Cornette) wants to know why her husband Jim is dressed in a Civil War uniform; Chris and Terry decide to make a quick exit from Mississippi; and John Hitchcock says he has herd enough. (60 min.)

(9) WHAT'S MY NAME?----Game
DEBUT: Tony Schiavone hosts the new memory game in which WCW wrestlers lose \$50 for every sentence in which they fail to say the words "Dusty Rhodes."

(38) GENERATIONS----Serial
Barry (Barry Windham) finds a new clue to where his father is when a

New Yorker named Herb says he's bringing in Blackjack as a booker.

12:30 P.M.

(9) TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES-----Game
Contestant Stan Lane has to eat Imperial margarine when suddenly, Jerry Lawler's crown appears on Stan's head.

(38) WHAT'S MY LINE?-----Game
The panel tries to figure out what it is Jack Tunney does.

1:00 P.M.

(3) AS THE WORLD TURNS-----Serial
Dr. Hughes tries to determine if Jake will ever see again after he's hit with a strange spray; Margo serves a warrant on Randy for smashing a macho sceptre on a warrior; and Bobby's brain disintegrates as he collapses when he departs a plane. (60 min.)

(9) ALL MY CHILDREN-----Serial
Mama Bossman arrives in Pine Valley from Cobb County, where she's been getting insulting letters from a man named Heenan; Missy (Missy Hyatt) and Erica (Susan Lucci) can't settle their differences, so they get into a slapping contest. (60 min.)

(38) DAYS OF OUR LIVES-----Serial
Virgil has enough and finally swings his belt at Ted; Larry (Larry Zbyszko) is told he only has 14 glorious months to live; and Frances Horton fries a chicken with the grease from Wayne Farris' hair. (60 min.)

2:00 P.M.

(3) MOVIE-----Science Fiction
"That Was Now...This Is Then." (1990)
Ole (Al Rogowski) announces to his

men, "I don't care what the calendar says. This is 1974. What worked then will work now." Mr. Tibbs: Thunderbolt Patterson. (2 hrs.)

(9) MOVIE-----Failure
"Great Expectations." (1990) Updated edition of the English classic, in which two men named Ultimate and Sting are placed at the top of their professions. (2 hrs.)

(38) MOVIE-----Rock Documentary
"The Freebirds' 10-Cent Tour." (1990)
Rockdoc of Michael Hayes and Jimmy Garvin being besieged by 25 TBS employees outside a Holiday Inn. (2 hrs.)

4:00 P.M.

(3) LASSIE-----Drama
Terry Funk becomes Lassie's 27th owner. While at the Double Cross Ranch, Terry makes the collie suck eggs. Timmy: Tim Horner.

(9) PEE WEE'S PLAYHOUSE-----Children
Randy Anderson announces he'll no longer do the show unless the name is changed.

(38) MERRIE MELODIES-----Cartoon
Elmer Fudd and Bugs Bunny end up in the battle royal finals of the AWA Team Challenge Series, after which Verne appears in the logo to say, "T-t-t-t-that's all, folks!"

4:30 P.M.

(3) TWILIGHT ZONE-----Drama
Bruiser Brody becomes the top star for the Universal Wrestling Federation Fury Hour. Herb: Mickey Rooney.

(9) JUST THE TEN OF US-----Comedy
Jerry Jarrett introduces the roster

of his Memphis promotion.

(38) GOLDEN GIRLS-----Comedy
Dorothy plots to get a date for Sophia (Estelle Getty) with Gordon Solie but Gordon can't find the house because his cataracts act up.

5:00 P.M.

(3) OPRAH WINFREY-----Discussion
Today's topic is "Music Which Drives You Crazy." Guest: Cactus Jack Manson, who goes maniacal when the band plays "Theme from World Championship Wrestling." (60 min.)

(9) SALLY JESSY RAPHAEL---Discussion
Ric Flair asks to borrow Sally's red glasses, so he can add a new element to "the look of the '90s." (60 min.)

(38) VINCE McMAHON-----Discussion
DEBUT: Vince joins the afternoon talk race by demonstrating how he barks those memorable WRESTLEMANIA promos by sucking in and spitting up mucus. (60 min.)

6:00 P.M.

(3) EYEWITNESS NEWS
Dave Meltzer begins a five-part series, "Great Mistakes." In tonight's opener, Dave details the hiring of Ole Anderson as a booker.

(9) ACTION NEWS
Wade Keller begins a five-part series, "Negotiations in the Persian Gulf." Tonight, Wade uncovers that Vince McMahon is personally holding secret talks to offer \$5 million to Saddam Hussein to take on Hulk Hogan at WRESTLEMANIA.

(38) NEWS CENTER 38
Ron Lemieux begins a five-part

series, "The End of the World." In tonight's opener, Ron uncovers plans for Dusty Rhodes' fourth NWA world title reign.

7:00 P.M.

(3) 60 MINUTES-----Newsmagazine
Mike Wallace investigates Vince McMahon's fetish for bald heavyweight champions; Morley Safer interviews Downtown Bruno's mama, who says, "It DOESN'T beez that way, sometimes." (60 min.)

(9) LITTLE RASCALS-----Comedy
Buckwheat (Rocky King) brings out his junkyard dog to stand up to his racist friends Ric and Ole.

(38) WALL STREET WEEK---Finance
Dick York introduces his daughter Alexandra and tells everyone her assistance to Michael Wallstreet doesn't come from a computer but from witchcraft. (60 min.)

7:30 P.M.

(9) INSIDE EDITION---Newsmagazine
Tonight, a special insider report, "The Butcher," as the barber who sculptured Ric Flair's "'90s look" haircut is profiled.

8:00 P.M.

(3) JOE PEDICINO ULTRA SLIM-FAST TELETHON
William Conrad is co-host for the evening-long event as viewers can pledge \$5 for every pound Joe can lose over the next six months. Celebrity guests include Virgil Runnels, John Tenta, Mike Shaw, Jerry Blackwell, Dump Matsumoto and Abdullah the Butcher. (Live; 4 hrs.)

(9) RESCUE 911---William Shatner
From Memphis, Bill shows how a rescue
crew revived Jerry Lawler in 15
minutes after being rundown by a
phantom Corvette driven by Thomas E.
Gilbert II. (60 min.)

(38) MATLOCK----Drama
Ben (Andy Griffith) investigates when
Eddie Marlin accuses Snowman (Eddie
Crawford) of selling his belt to a
drug dealer. (60 min.)

9:00 P.M.

(9) PRIME MTV WITH MARTHA QUINN
Martha originates the final battle of
the bands between the Freebirds and
Power and Glory. But Jimmy Garvin
and Greg Valentine admit they're
afflicted with Milli Vanilliitis.
(Live; 60 min.)

(38) DAVID COPPERFIELD----Magic
SPECIAL: David admits he was the
Black Scorpion in Jacksonville,
Florida, and Chicago. (60 min.)

10:00 P.M.

(9) DARK SHADOWS----Mystery
Barnabas (Ben Cross) bites Sherri
(Sherri Martel) on the neck and
declares it's the ugliest woman he's
ever bitten. Ric Flair, in an odd
twist, takes Paul Heyman with him to
Collins House and when the lights go
out, Paul says, "Thank you SO much
for being here. I kiss your hand."
(60 min.)

(38) UNSOLVED MYSTERIES
Host Robert Stack tries to find out
if Chris Cruise has become Terry
Funk's son-in-law; he probes whatever
happened to Dennis Condrey; and
examines the 1978 incident when Mar-
ty Jannetty released 3,000 crickets
in Columbus High School. (60 min.)

11:00 P.M.

(9) ARSENIO HALL----Variety
Arsenio calls guest Theodore R. Long
"peanuthead" and Teddy calls Arsenio
"triangle-head." (60 min.)

(38) HARD COPY----Newsmagazine
In an exclusive interview, Broadway
Sonny Blaze admits he was turned down
when he applied to become The Black
Scorpion. Kimberly Murphy is told by
Axel Rotton: "Some women are a site
for sore eyes. You are a cataract."

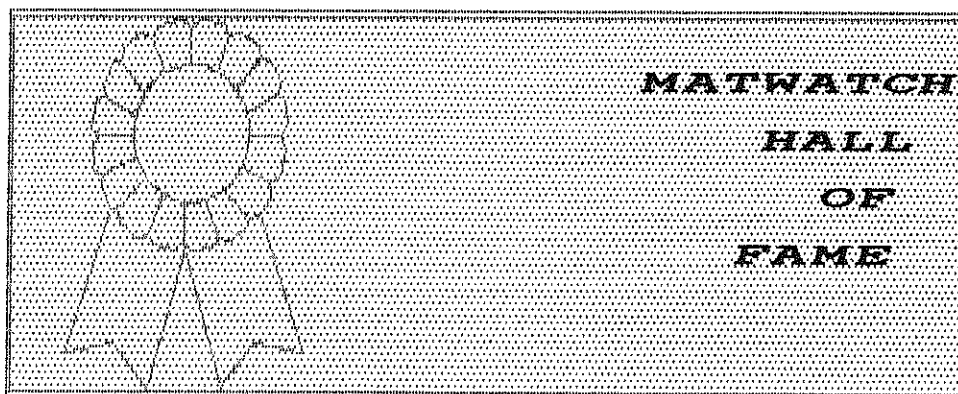
11:30 P.M.

(9) NIGHTLINE----Ted Koppel
Ted interviews Vince McMahon, Jim
Herd, Jerry Jarrett and Herb Abrams
by satellite in an effort to negoti-
ate fewer hours of wrestling on tel-
evision. Vince tries to buy Ted to
become his anchor at the WWF Events
Center. Herd asks Ted why ABC does-
n't change hosts on NIGHTLINE every
six months. Jarrett tells Ted he
needs to bleed on camera to get a
bigger audience and Herb tells Ted he
can get Bruiser Brody as a live
guest. (Live; 90 min.)

12:00 A.M.

(3) TELETHON WRAPUP
Joe Pedicino is taken to a hospital
with a hiatal hernia after four hours
of live starvation. As the ambulance
is pulling away, Tommy Lasorda tells
Joe, "C'mon. If I can do it...YOU
can do it!" (Live)

(Stations reserve the right to
change their lineups at any time,
either through promotional decisions
or mass defections.)

BEST BROADCAST/CABLE TV MATCH

- 1989 - Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat,
RAGIN' CAJUN CLASH.
1988 - Midnight Express vs.
Fantastics, NWA WORLD WIDE.

BEST PPV MATCH

- 1989 - Flair vs. Steamboat, CHI-TOWN
RUMBLE.
1988 - Flair vs. Sting, CLASH I (then
called BEST CABLE OR PPV
MATCH).

BEST NEW CHARACTER(S)

- 1989 - Skyscrapers, NWA.
1988 - Varsity Club, NWA.

BEST LIVE TV SUPERCARD

- 1989 - BASH/GLORY DAYS, NWA.
1988 - CLASH I, NWA.

BEST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

- 1989 - Jim Ross, NWA.
1988 - Jim Ross, NWA.

BEST COLOR COMMENTATOR

- 1989 - Jesse Ventura, WWF.
1988 - Jesse Ventura, WWF.

BEST WEEKLY TV SERIES

- 1989 - WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING,
TBS.
1988 - WWF SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING.

BEST SINGLE PERFORMANCE

- 1989 - TERRY FUNK, "The Turn of Ric
Flair," NWA.

RIISING STAR OF THE YEAR

- 1989 - Scott Steiner, NWA.
1988 - Rick Steiner, NWA.

OUTSTANDING TV PERSONALITY

- 1989 - Terry Funk, PWF/NWA.
1988 - Jim Cornette, NWA.

WORST BROADCAST/CABLE MATCH

- 1989 - Paul Jones vs. Ivan Koloff,
NWA CLASH IV, TBS.
1988 - Baron Von Raschke vs. Soldad
Ustinov, AWA.

WORST PPV MATCH

- 1989 - Tommy Rich vs. Cuban Assassin,
NWA HALLOWEEN HAVOC.
1988 - Ultimate Warrior vs. Hercules
Hernandez, WRESTLEMANIA IV.

WORST NEW CHARACTER

1989 - Dingdongs, NWA.
 1988 - Akeem, WWF.

WORST COLOR COMMENTATOR

1989 - Verne Gagne, AWA.
 1988 - Superstar Billy Graham, WWF.

WORST SUPERCARD

1989 - WRESTLEMANIA V, WWF.
 1988 - WRESTLEMANIA IV, WWF.

DECLINING STAR OF THE YEAR

1989 - Andre the Giant, WWF.
 1988 - Rock & Roll Express, NWA/CWA/AWA/ACW.

WORST WEEKLY TV SERIES

1989 - AWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING,
 ESPN.
 1988 - WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING,
 NWA/TBS.

WORST TV PERSONALITY

1989 - The Ultimate Warrior, WWF.
 1988 - David Crockett, NWA.

WORST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

1989 - David Crockett, NWA.
 1988 - David Crockett, NWA.

**SPECIAL
 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

FAMILY FEUD photos). Steve's pictures are available from P.O. Box 2995, Murfreesboro TN 37133-2995. Please write him for a list. Ross Blair of MAT REVIEW NEWSLETTER provided us with the FEUD and UWF shots. We'll post a full address in a special box for Ross's shots in an upcoming MATWATCH. As always, we thank Bill Kunkel for the cartoons and Dr. Gerald Morton for his excellent short story contribution.

Through the year, Dave Meltzer of THE WRESTLING OBSERVER is an invaluable help, as is Ron Lemieux of ARENA REPORT, Wade Keller of PRO WRESTLING TORCH, and correspondents such as Shamon Rose, K.B. (Klon) Herron, David Williamson, Dick (Norman) Bourne, Larry Katz, Kimberly Murphy, John Arezzi, Dan Farren, Chris Crosby and certainly two dozen or so others we have innocently overlooked. Our thanks to all.

Let us all hope that the year 1991 will be a rebounding one for pro wrestling. But more than anything, let us hope and pray that by the time the 1991 MATWATCH annual appears, we will have something far more important---peace in the Persian Gulf and peace in the entire world.

Again, as in past year, to acknowledge everyone we would like to is impossible and certainly, we will unintentionally omit some people. I particularly want to thank the people who contributed photography and artwork to this annual: Steve Bryant (who offered all pictures except the UWF and